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Environmental Documentary Film: A Contemporary Tool For Social Movement

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ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTARY FILM

A CONTEMPORARY TOOL FOR SOCIAL MOVEMENT

By

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ABSTRACT

Building a 21st century movement capable of inspiring social and structural change requires creative education, resourceful collaboration, and civic engagement. The U.S. environmental movement is in need of strategies that bring a wide spectrum of people together, facilitate appropriate interpretation of problems, and prompt innovative, forward-thinking solutions. Environmental documentary film has the ability to dramatize the reality of environmental issues and empower audiences to become an active part of the change necessary to address environmental crises. Utilizing a specific genre of environmental documentary film in novel and inventive ways, people can be gathered, educated, and inspired to become active participants in a more productive environmental movement.

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INTRODUCTION

"The important events in drama are not accidents of nature, disease, or automobiles — things that occur because of some outside force that we call Fate. Drama is about individual human decisions and actions, and the consequences of both."

- Howard Suber, "The Power of Film"

Building a 21st century movement capable of inspiring social and structural change requires creative education, resourceful collaboration, and civic engagement. The U.S. environmental movement is in need of strategies that bring a wide spectrum of people together, facilitate appropriate interpretation of problems, and prompt innovative, forward-thinking solutions. Environmental documentary film has the ability to dramatize the reality of environmental issues and empower audiences to become an active part of the change necessary to address environmental crises. Utilizing a specific genre of environmental documentary film in novel and inventive ways, people can be gathered, educated, and inspired to become active participants in a more productive environmental movement.

This project that looks to identify what this genre is, what elements of film create this genre, and how creative use of the genre can be instrumental in addressing the rhetorical challenges of the environmental movement. I begin with a look at the current state of the environmental movement, and an investigation of the rhetorical challenges that the movement is facing. I then shift to looking at the potential for using film to address these challenges, and propose a study for identifying which strategies of film have the greatest potential for mobilizing a more effective environmental movement.

The ultimate purpose of this project is to provide guidelines for a genre of film that can be of great utility to environmental organizations as they strive to rebuild a struggling social movement. I begin here by investigating the rhetorical struggle of the environmental movement so as to reveal the rhetorical strategies that must be engaged in the effort to rejuvenate the environmental social movement.

THE RHETORICAL SITUATION: The Modern Environmental Movement

In the year 2020 the environmental movement will celebrate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. We could have a lot to celebrate in nine years. Environmental campaigns in their infancy today could see growth and foster positive change over the next decade. Solutions to recession could take the form of an ecological modernization "new deal," retrofitting American infrastructure to build a more ecological social economy.

We could also have a lot to lament. If carbon emissions remain at the same level as today, warming in the earth's atmosphere could increase the average temperature of the earth up to 4.5° Celsius (Ekwerzel, 2007). The environmental footprint of the United States could see an increase of over 250% since 1970. We are already beginning to see the consequences of the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events that are arguably a result of global warming (Solomon *et al*, 2007), and the proliferation of unsustainable consumption practices has dire implications for pollution, waning resources and growing landfills (Dauvergne, 2008).

Today the landscape of environmentalism is in many ways vast and intimidating. However, the humble beginnings of the U.S. environmental movement were founded on basic values for the conservation and preservation of wild western landscapes, guided by

the values and ideals of John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt and the Sierra Club. Over time, the movement has become a decidedly social movement, gaining ground in the 1960s as part of a larger critique that included civil rights, women's rights, and antiwar movements (Parker-Gwin, 2000, p. 511). As a social movement, the ultimate goal of the environmental movement is to create a sustainable society; however, the movement is comprised of multiple communities that embrace environmentalism in different ways for different reasons (Brulle, 2008). As environmental issues multiply and intensify, the diversity of environmental interests has become problematic, and diverts efforts away from the central goal of sustainability (Knudson, 2001). While results-oriented grassroots efforts experience growth and success in mobilizing sustainability agendas (Silveria, 2001, Knudson, 2001), the influence of traditional environmental organizations on media and policy is waning even as environmental concerns increase (Brulle & Jenkins, 2008).

Historically, the environmental movement has undoubtedly seen its share of success, but the modern environmental movement is a fragmented and struggling movement that has had to learn from mistakes and evolve alongside powerful societies, governments and corporations that largely oppose its goals (Knudson, 2001; Rosenblatt, 2004; Maibach, Roser-Renouf & Lieserowitz, 2009). Critics of the environmental movement question climate science and accuse environmentalists of using environmental rhetoric as veiled attacks on industry and globalization (Bradley, 2003). Within the environmental movement the diversity of interests, issues and tactics often hinders progress, spreads resources thin, and complicates any sense of unified effort (Rosenblatt, 2004). This opens the movement to further criticism from opponents of environmental

agendas, such as Wise Use groups, developers, landowners and resource intensive industries. The legitimacy of the environmental movement has been questioned and challenged by a conservative countermovement (McCright & Dunlap, 2000). Likewise, it has become difficult for the environmental movement to manage impressions, garner support, reinforce positive identity for members, and foster actions that appropriately address the problem of climate change. These challenges are common to many types of social movements; however, the current effects and future consequences of global warming and climate change add a great deal of urgency to the work of the environmental movement. It is important to take a closer look at the rhetoric of the environmental movement to understand how a movement truly capable of combating global warming and climate change might be built.

Scholars in communication studies provide an understanding of the challenges of the environmental movement in a rhetorical sense, a critical first step in understanding the praxis of social movement and its failure or ability to promote civic action and social change. This paper begins with an evaluation of the rhetorical challenges of the environmental movement based on Stewart, Smith and Denton's (2007) description of the six primary persuasive functions social movements must fulfill to achieve a measure of success. By understanding these persuasive challenges, as considered by communication scholarship, we can gain a better understanding of which persuasive strategies to abandon, which strategies to sustain, and what new strategies of persuasion should be pursued. Secondly, I will propose a study for looking at how the creative use of a certain genre of environmental documentary film can in many ways address the rhetorical

challenges of the environmental movement and help to foster a productive vision of sustainability for the 21st century.

THEORY

PERSUASION AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Social movements exist and operate under many pressures and constraints. Because of these constraints, persuasion is the primary agency for satisfying requirements and meeting obstacles (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p. 21). To build a social movement, individuals and groups must be persuaded to support a cause, societies must be convinced to support or resist particular ideologies and behaviors, and governments must be influenced to make laws in support of social and economic demands. Put more plainly, persuasion enables social movement to come into existence, meet opposition and possibly bring about or resist change (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.49).

Stewart, Smith and Denton (2007) propose six interrelated persuasive functions that a social movement must perform to be in existence and experience success: (1) transforming perceptions of reality; (2) altering self-perceptions of protesters; (3) legitimizing the movement; (4) prescribing courses of action; (5) mobilizing for action; and (6) sustaining the movement. Though these persuasive functions are not unique to social movements, movements are separated from other collectives because they are uninstitutionalized collectives with limited power and access to persuasive means such as media, which places constraints on the six persuasive functions (Stewart, Smith and Denton, 2007, p.49). The functions do not occur chronologically or in any particular order, rather each demands continued attention (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.50). All six functions must be performed; however, several conditions impact which function

takes prominence at different times. These conditions include fundamental programs for change, the degree of change desired, the exigencies of the rhetorical situation, and the stage of the movement (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.49).

Although all six persuasive functions are essential for the environmental movement, and all six functions will be addressed here, this paper argues that three functions are especially crucial for the movement at this time: altering self-concepts and outsiders' concepts of environmentalists; legitimizing movement; and sustaining movement. Environmental organizations are visible and active, and mobilization is happening on many fronts; however, there is a need for development of strong environmental identity that will allow for greater legitimization of environmental causes and ultimately spur mobilization and sustain the movement over time. As the following analysis will show, attention to these three functions is most important at this point in time because of the rhetorical constraints related to each.

In the following sections I will introduce Stewart, Smith and Denton's (2007) six persuasive functions individually, explaining what each function is meant to accomplish, how it applies to the environmental movement, and what rhetorical challenges for the movement are associated with each according to communication studies literature. In the final paragraphs of each section I will draw upon the assessments of the rhetorical challenges of the environmental movement to make suggestions about how environmental movement organizations can adjust their rhetorical strategies, as related to the six persuasive functions, to be effective in advancing environmental agendas. These suggestions will help build the framework for my analysis of how environmental

documentary film can effectively perform persuasive functions that restore momentum to the environmental movement.

Transforming Perceptions of Reality

"Social movement persuaders," say Stewart, Smith and Denton (2007), "must transform how people see their environment – the past, the present and the future – to convince them that an intolerable situation exists that warrants urgent attention and action" (p.50). Calling attention to the past can raise awareness of unknown truths, remind people of ugly times, correct past illusions and offer historical revelations (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.50-51). Educating people about a present situation can help them become aware of its existence and severity, and emphasize paradoxes or inconsistencies of institutions the movement opposes (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.52-55). A focus on present institutional conflicts allows the movement to show how the values of the institution are corrupt or opposite what they should be (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.55). A vision of the future illustrates that something must be done before it is too late, which instills a sense of the urgent need for a change in the status quo (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p. 55). This vision can either offer a hopeful perception of the future, projecting a utopian rhetoric, or a dark and despairing future, using slippery slope or apocalyptic appeals in hopes of motivating rapid action.

The environmental movement leans heavily on transforming visions of the future, utilizing doomsday and apocalyptic appeals, such as the consequences of Arctic ice melt or diseases spreading to higher elevations as the planet warms, to illustrate the potential catastrophic consequences of environmental degradation. Indeed, scientific evidence

suggests that we are already moving beyond sustainable carbon thresholds (McKibben, 2008) and exceeding the carrying capacity of the earth (Campbell, 2011), which warrants warnings about the future fate of our planet and its inhabitants. But apocalyptic appeals are failing to gain traction with the public in the 21st century (Schnoor, 2005), which has not always been the case, therefore it is important to understand the rhetorical situation today to understand what types of appeals are more appropriate or how to reframe apocalyptic narratives to increase their ability to motivate action.

Apocalyptic narratives of climate change that were successful for Rachel Carson and others in the 1960s and 70s are today perceived, by those who doubt environmental science, as alienating and offensive, which ultimately works against the cause of the environmental movement rather than for it. Environmental discourses should help the movement learn from past mistakes, gain support for present goals, and promote appropriate change for a more sustainable future. Instead, the use of apocalyptic and tipping point narratives of climate change distorts human responses by focusing on avoidance rather than adaptation (Russil, 2008, p.147). These warnings emphasize the magnitude of problems in a way that devalues conventional ways of responding to environmental concern, or promote an urgency that is exaggerated to the point that any possible human response is inadequate (Russil, 2008, p.147). Robert J. Brulle (2005) says reactions to these warnings come in two forms. First, claims are ignored, denied, or blamed to be unrealistic and extremist. Second, our society has largely accommodated and adapted to environmental degradation. As individuals become used to a degraded environment, their standards of environmental health and integrity decline, and environmental problems become part of an everyday normality (Buell, 2004, p.7).

This assessment suggests that the environmental movement should seek to transform perceptions of reality such that urgency is recognized and appreciated, but not threatening. Perception of future realities should also include a healthy dose of hope, providing guidance on how to adequately respond to environmental concerns. Providing a positive, specific vision of a sustainable society or sustainable lifestyle can help to make environmental problems seem more manageable for individual actors. To do so, it is useful to emphasize the diverse benefits of a sustainable society rather than leaning heavily on what will happen if we do not embrace sustainable behaviors. It is important to strike a balance, perhaps, by encouraging people to do things differently simply because they are more efficient, healthy or profitable, not solely because such behaviors are environmentally friendly.

It is also important for the movement to balance transformations of future realities with past and present frames. "Innovative movements," say Stewart, Smith and Denton (2007), "portray a defective present resulting from an intolerable past and argue that the future can be bright if the movement is successful" (p. 58). Though awareness of environmental problems has grown significantly in the past decade (Dunlap, 2010), gaining sensitivity to past illusions can help people act with more precaution today, even amidst scientific uncertainty. Failing to exercise foresight and ecological responsibility in the past has lead to present environmental problems, such as soil erosion, landslides and loss of biodiversity from deforestation, or water contamination from mine tailings. Likewise, a healthier understanding of present issues is critical if future consequences are to be mitigated. Further environmental degradation is the penalty for present inaction. Therefore, the better educated we become now about the causes of environmental

degradation, the more empowered we are to exercise precaution and take the necessary steps to prevent environmentally damaging practices.

Altering Self-Perceptions of Protesters

Stewart, Smith and Denton (2007) claim that enhancing the self-perceptions of protesters is an essential rhetorical function of social movements because taking on powerful institutions and entrenched cultural norms requires a strong, healthy ego (p. 58). The ego function provides the psychological refurbishing and affirmation a protester needs as they confront movement struggles (Gregg, 1971, p.74), giving them the feeling that they can change the world (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.58). According to Stewart, Smith and Denton, (2007), movements are either *self-directed*, populated by those who perceive themselves to be dispossessed and struggling for their own freedom, equality and justice; or *other-directed*, populated by people struggling for the rights of others (p.58).

Stewart, Smith and Denton's (2007) model does not quite work for the environmental movement on this point, as there is essentially a third party involved: the environment. Like many movements, the environmental movement is both self- and other-directed; however, the environmental movement also demands an orientation towards non-human entities as well, or an environment-directed approach. I argue that all types of movement actors, not just protesters, and no matter their orientation to the movement, need strong identity support if the environmental movement is to create a united front and remain a cohesive collective.

Many protesters in the environmental movement identify with a self-directed movement, in which protesters are part of a group of people who have been wronged because their rights to a healthy environment have been denied; therefore their struggle is for environmental rights and equal treatment. The environmental justice frame has embraced this approach since the 1980s (Mohai, Pellow & Roberts, 2009, p.420) and has been the key to victories over corporate institutions in places such as the Love Canal neighborhood in New York, Warren County in North Carolina, and Kettleman City in California. Protest and confrontation are certainly essential to social movement work, and are what some scholars find to be the conceptual underpinning of social movement (Cathcart, 1978), the means of defining movement to insiders and outsiders (Short, 1991) and potentially reconstituting the identity of mainstream culture (DeLuca, 1999).

But not all movement actors are protesters. Richard Gregg (1971) argued that "the rhetoric [of protest] is basically self-directed, not other-directed…thus it can be said to be fulfilling the ego-function" (p.74). Following Gregg (1971), other-directed environmental movement members may struggle for the rights of those less fortunate and support the environmental justice frame, but they do not require the ego support of self-directed protesters. Their actions may not take the form of direct protest; rather they prefer other forms of civic engagement or even silent support. The same is true for those who take an environment-directed approach, such as preservationists and deep ecologists.

Nonetheless, I argue that other-directed and environmental-directed movement actors still need to see themselves as substantive forces of change and embrace an environmental identity that is robust, sustainable, infectious, and capable of advancing the agenda of the environmental movement. There are several issues associated with

environmental identity that challenge Stewart, Smith and Denton's (2007) theory on altering self-perceptions, and that complicate the ability of the environmental movement to help members see themselves as substantive forces of change. Looking closely at these issues can help us understand what barriers are keeping the environmental movement from uniting its own collectives and gaining membership and support from outsiders.

First, as part of "altering-self concepts" of protesters, Stewart, Smith and Denton (2007) should explain the need for a movement to guide outsiders' perceptions of protesters, because protest behavior has a great impact on outsiders' impressions of a movement (DeLuca, 1999). The term "environmentalist" has in many ways become a "dirty word" (Merrifield, 1995; Corbett, 2006). In their essay "The Death of Environmentalism," Shellenberger and Nordhaus' (2004) make a key observation that sheds light on why outsiders dislike the idea of being an environmentalist: "Most people wake up in the morning trying to reduce what they have to worry about. Environmentalists wake up trying to increase it" (p.28). Connotations of the word "environmentalist" are often associated with worry, fear, change, and blatant demonstration. Personified, an environmentalist is often pictured as a hippie, liberal, and troublemaker, and given the negative epithet of "tree-hugger" (DeLoach, Bruner & Gosset, 2002, p.99). The fact is negative social opinions of environmentalists can discourage people from calling themselves environmentalists or embracing an "environmental identity," even if they support environmental agendas. As a result, even as environmental awareness increases, adoption of pro-environmental behavior is elusive (McKinley, 2008). Perceptions of environmentalists as separatist and radical complicate the efforts of the environmental movement to mobilize even its own members. If

movement insiders are hesitant to identify with the movement, it makes it more difficult for outsiders to find salience and trust in movement messages.

Second, membership and access to the environmental movement is often perceived as "privileged." If one does not perceive oneself as part of the elite group of preservationists, conservationists, or reform environmentalists, they consequently feel like outsiders and are disinclined to engage or promote these environmental agendas, or seek an alternative discourse of sustainability (Brulle, 2005). Likewise, elitism has allowed environmental politics and business to become self-serving and pacify larger environmental concerns (Bate, 2000). Essentially, environmental elitism makes it more difficult for the movement to produce a vision of sustainability that is capable of mobilizing a wider membership base if the perceived vision of sustainability only appeals to the needs of upper class white citizens (Brulle, 2005). Additionally, it narrows the targets available for identification with environmental organizations and the movement as a whole (Cheney, 1983), and runs the risk of promoting negative dis-identification with the movement (Scott, Corman & Cheney, 1998).

The final and perhaps most important issue of identity and the environmental movement is the need for the movement to redefine the human-nature relationship. Unfortunately, it is widely believed that nature exists for the purpose of human use, which has produced an attitude of dominion over nature (Cox, 2010, p.47). Environmental discourses of the aesthetic sublime and transcendentalism argue, however, that humans and nature are interconnected, interdependent, and in fact humans are a part of nature, and we cannot exist separate from nature (Cox, 2010, p.48). Under this notion, environmental problems become human problems, and the environmental crisis is a

human crisis. An environmental movement capable of addressing the urgency of environmental problems such as global warming and climate change must be able to instill the ideology of human-nature connectedness as an innate part of who we are.

These three problems related to identity and the environmental movement explain why environmental identity, as perceived by outsiders, may be undesirable, inaccessible, contradictory to cultural and political values, and largely unproductive for the environmental movement. So what needs to change? How can the environmental movement provide larger and more appealing targets for identification? What must be done to instill a greater value for human-nature connectedness?

Part of the answer lies in legitimizing the environmental movement, which will be discussed in more depth later on. When a movement gains greater legitimacy and experiences more success, both insiders and outsiders feel more inclined to identify with the movement. But what about building environmental identity when the movement's legitimacy is waning? How can self-concepts be altered to support environmental agendas?

First, the above assessment suggests that personifications of "environmentalist" deserve work. People of all shapes, sizes, colors and walks of life embrace environmentalism, a fact that needs to be emphasized by environmental organizations. Re-branding "environmentalist" or removing branding of any sort should be a goal of both identity campaigns and the movement as a whole. Rather than using "environmentalism" as a virtuous label, the intrinsic values of environmentalism can serve as a rationale for taking on sustainable behaviors.

Second, environmental organizations must work to be more inclusive and avoid classifying environmentalism as a doctrine of the elite. To do this, environmental agendas must show openness to a wide range of publics. Some important environmental organizations frame their appeals to attract wealthy donors, ignoring the fact that many echelons of people are attracted to preserving wilderness, protecting endangered animals, and conserving resources. Additionally, most environmental problems are the concern of *all* humans, and excluding certain groups from participation in the movement discourages collective action. Using consistent messages and diversifying environmental campaigns is essential if the movement is to support the self-concepts of current and potential movement actors.

Third, to engender an ideology that embraces human-nature connectedness, environmental organizations must work to help people create meaning in doing things more sustainably, making sustainable living a value-added experience. Simply changing behavior because one way is more environmentally friendly than another may not be convincing. But if doing something differently because I can meet people, engage in community events, and feel healthier as a result, I may feel more inclined to embrace that new behavior. As an example, this approach has been the root of the success for the local food movement, which essentially reframes food as community, not commodity, a pleasure made possible through human relationships (Starr, 2010). This method can be adapted to other environmental causes and will help to widen targets for environmental identification and support diverse self-concepts of being an "environmentalist."

Legitimizing Movement

Stewart, Smith and Denton (2007) suggest two rhetorical elements necessary for legitimization of movement: (1) conferring the right to exercise authoritative influence and make demands; and (2) retaining legitimacy once it is conferred. When an institution is conferred legitimacy, it is because it is conferred the power of reward, control, identification, terministic control, and moral suasion (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.62-63). This means the legitimated institution is trusted with five powers: to reward and punish those who follow or reject its rules; regulate the flow of information to members and the populace; act as the keeper of symbols and values of the social order; control language and meanings; and operate in the moral realms of attitudes and emotional attachments (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.62-63). .

Essentially this means that a social movement must gain the trust of the general public, establish worth and right, and utilize a strong moral stance and tone "to attain positive relational patterns with the larger society" (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.60-66). Social movements can take a coactive or a confrontational approach when engaging this moral struggle. A coactive approach identifies with fundamental societal norms, transporting the movement "from the margins of society to the center," where legitimacy is more accessible (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.63). This may mean reworking pieces of tradition into new narratives that befit he social movement's ideology, or linking with traditional rights and values such as equality and justice (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.64). Other coactive strategies include incorporating into legal organizations and operating openly to avoid secrecy, or identifying with other movements that have already gained legitimacy (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.65).

The goal of confrontational approaches on the other hand, such as sit-ins, boycotts and demonstrations, is to break a "rhetorical stalemate," raising the social movement to a transcendent social position, or at least making the status quo seem less legitimate (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 67).

The environmental movement has engaged many different strategies, some organizations working towards the center of society and politics to make changes, others working on the fringes to resist the social order and provide a salient alternative to the unsustainable status quo. Confrontational strategies, though often controversial, have the ability to raise critical consciousness and challenge the status quo when all other forms of communication have been exhausted (Cathcart, 1978, p.236), and the environmental movement continues to reap the rewards of the confrontational approach (Silveira, 2001). However, confrontational rhetoric alone cannot attain legitimacy for the movement, rather it must be a combination of confrontational *and* coactive strategies (Stewart, Smith & Denton, p. 63, 69).

In the 1960s and 70s, the U.S. environmental movement, using a combination of coactive and confrontational approaches (Silveira, 2001), experienced legislative victories including the Clean Water Acts, the Clean Air Act, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), foundational policies that were meant to guide multiple facets of decision making and make these processes more environmentally just. Since then, the environmental movement has experienced a number of political defeats (Brulle & Jenkins, 2008) and some believe that the institutions of environmentalism have become "outmoded" (Shellenberger & Nordhaus, 2004) and are in need of "overhaul" (Harder, 2011).

For example, ESA and NEPA could have been the beginning of a trend for environmentally responsible policy. Instead we have seen the U.S. government reject the Kyoto protocol, raise arms in protection of environmentally destructive oil securities, and pass legislation that favors corporate interests over sustainability. We have seen the American public continue to depend on petroleum despite their critical response to oil spills in Alaska and the Gulf of Mexico. We have seen consumption habits persist despite the proliferation of the "green" movement. Environmental groups have failed to adapt to the political trends that prioritize economic interests over social demands. Essentially, the traditional strategies of the environmental movement have largely lost their influence over major policy change. Failure of the environmental movement to adapt coactive approaches, as politics are increasingly motivated by economics and growth, has left the power to establish identification, terministic control and moral suasion in the hands of environmentally destructive corporate institutions.

As a *social* movement, however, the environmental movement's loss of political influence and legitimacy in Washington is only one part of the problem when it comes to conferring legitimacy. For a movement to become legitimate in the eyes of the general public it has to be able to move large numbers of people to agree that there is a moral obligation for change that cannot be ignored (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.17). There are a number of obstacles for the environmental movement in this venture. Unsustainable lifestyles are arguably a product of capitalist consumer society (Shah, 2011), but society has also widely embraced social norms and standards that keep people entrenched in the "bad habits," or lack of environmental morals, that perpetuate environmental problems. Social acceptance of the consumer lifestyle is prevalent, and

thus far, discursive frames of environmentalism have failed to provide a salient lifestyle alternative that persuades society to prioritize ecological responsibility over conspicuous consumption.

The central issue here is the lack of agreement between environmental discursive frames on the source of environmental degradation, which means that environmental organizations operate under differing cultural viewpoints and have different demands (Brulle, 2008). For example, environmental justice advocates believe environmental problems are socially created and solved; therefore efforts to change this system must happen through the empowerment of local communities (Brulle, 2008, p.7). The anti-globalization/green advocates, on the other hand, see environmental problems as a product of global abuses created by capitalism, and demand the elimination of financial institutions so that domestic governments can become accountable to their own populaces (Brulle, 2008, p.11). Ecofeminism and ecospiritualism call for reform guided by morals and a value for equality (Brulle, 2008, p.9).

Some scholars find that the diversity of approaches by environmental groups has been and will be the key to the survival of the movement over time (Silveira, 2001; Johnson, 2006; Cooper, 1996). However, the ecological footprint of the United States has continued to rise (Brulle, 2005), which indicates that the movement is not succeeding in mitigating environmental degradation, a failure felt by many who embrace environmentalism, despite their discursive frame.

Thus this assessment suggests that there is a great need for agreement on the main sources of environmental degradation, such that coactive strategies have a broad target for addressing change and confrontational strategies have a consistent target for

resistance. This will help individuals connect the dots between personal, local concerns, and the dramatic, global threats to which environmental groups are devoting energy (Brulle & Jenkins, 2008, p.18). Collective concentration by environmental organizations on the most fundamental common sources of environmental degradation could provide the energy and public support needed to restore legitimacy to the environmental movement. Collective concentration can also provide access to the resources necessary to win the moral battles that surround policy change and cultural embrace of alternative sustainable lifestyles.

The current legitimate frame is a hegemonic order, and social movement persuaders find themselves attempting to overcome the definition of a "situation they themselves take part in as part of the natural order" (Gamson, 1992). Many environmentalists participate in unsustainable practices because they are subject to a system that does not support alternatives to the status quo. For example, I may be interested in feeding my children organic and local food, but perhaps the only food source I can access by public transportation is a big box supermarket that does not supply organic food. Overcoming these types of problems requires collective efforts of multiple groups to solve interconnected issues. The greater the reinforcement behind solving environmental social problems, the more motivated people are to take action on interconnected concerns, and the more legitimate these environmental efforts become in the eyes of the public. How social movements guide what people actually do as a result of this motivation is the subject of the following section.

Prescribing Courses of Action

"Prescribing courses of action," say Stewart, Smith and Denton (2007), "constitutes selling the social movement's ideology" (p. 69). A social movement must provide a resonant discourse that specifies a set of beliefs about how the world should operate and what should be done as a result of those beliefs (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.69). This set of beliefs or ideology articulates what is to be done, how it should be done, and who must do it (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.69-70).

One issue for the environmental movement when it comes to prescribing courses of action, similar to the issues related to legitimization, is the long list of ideologies that reside under the umbrella of environmentalism. Once again, an issue arises from lack of agreement between environmental discursive frames on the source of environmental degradation (Brulle, 2008). Even though not all environmental discourses are created equal, studies show that most environmental organizations are represented by the long-established discursive frames of Conservationism, Preservationism, or Reform Environmentalism (Brulle, 2008, p.11).

Brulle (2005) contends that there are significant limitations to these three mainstream environmental discourses, however, which make it difficult to "sell" the ideology of the environmental movement. Conservationism is the view that nature is a resource to be managed and used by human society for human needs. Brulle (2005) argues that Conservationism as an environmental discourse is anthropocentric, lacks a connection to the larger idea of social justice, and has persisted for a century despite accelerating ecological degradation (Brulle, 2005, p.8). Preservationism also lacks a larger social vision. The exclusive preservationist concern for protecting wilderness and

biodiversity abandons the potential for Preservationism to provide a model that informs design of a more ecologically sustainable human society (Brulle, 2005, p.9). Reform Environmentalism, the most progressive mainstream environmental discourse, focuses debates among specific communities, which takes attention away from the larger system and "hinders creation of large-scale collective action" (Brulle, 2005, p.9). Reform Environmentalism also assumes that education about environmental degradation will outweigh economic and corporate interests (Brulle, 2005, p.10), but countermovements launched by corporate advocacy groups "have cast doubt on scientific studies documenting environmental problems" (Brulle & Jenkins 2008, p.16). More simply, empirical evidence has lost power against the cunning of corporate public relations.

Another issue for prescribing environmental movement action is how movement demands are interpreted by outsiders and legitimating institutions. Direct action environmental groups, seeking to gain the attention of the media and public, are criticized as being rude and crude, and this type of action can prevent such groups from entering into good relationships with those in power (DeLuca, 1999). Examples of such criticized action might be the "cracking" of the Glen Canyon Dam in 1981 by the group Earth First!, the arson of meat packing plants and ski resort buildings by the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), and Greenpeace activists climbing Arctic oil rigs to position themselves in the way of deep sea drills. Though the literal message of these groups is a demand that unsustainable practices halt, such actions can project unrealistic and impractical visions of a sustainable future. This can leave important publics, such as policymakers, with the conclusion that the environmental agenda demands a return to primitive human existence: park our cars, move into a cave, live naked and eat nuts (Sheppard, 2011). At the very

least, it can obscure a more practical vision of sustainability meant to guide more broad social action on environmental issues. DeLuca (1999) argues, and I agree, that the unorthodox rhetoric of extreme environmental groups can reconstitute the identity of a dominant culture (p.16). This can function to promote a new consciousness and rearticulate ideology in a way that is acknowledged by the dominant culture. However, the capacity of radical confrontational acts to transform society is grossly limited if legitimizing institutions take extreme demands as literal requests. This increases the importance for the environmental movement guide public reaction to such actions, and transform visions of social reality to promote a specific, pragmatic vision of a sustainable future.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the above appraisal. Though Brulle (2005) reveals the shortcomings of the three mainstream environmental discourses, all three have been highly influential and have prompted actions that have forwarded the environmental movement agenda (Brulle, 2008); therefore Brulle's (2005) evaluation at the very least suggests elements of an environmental discourse that is capable of prescribing courses of action. Rather than being anthropocentric, environmental discourse should embrace the interdependent relationship of humans and nature. Environmentalism should articulate an agenda of ecological justice and social justice, and provide a model of sustainability that guides action. Environmental discourse should also prioritize collective action over marginal group work, if it is to truly foster social movement and systemic change. Finally, the environmental movement must assert pragmatic problem solving instead of assuming scientific evidence will speak for itself. To sell a compelling ideology capable of achieving political and social change, the

environmental movement must offer a vision of sustainability and "a plausible theory of transition to an ecological society," (Brulle, 2005).

It is here that we begin to see how Stewart, Smith and Denton's (2007) persuasive functions overlap and interact. The need for the environmental movement to foster collective efforts is critical for legitimizing movement, prescribing courses of action, and mobilizing action. A vision of a sustainable future is critical for transforming perceptions of reality and prescribing courses of action. The shortcomings of the three mainstream environmental discourses are not only problematic for prescribing courses of action, but also for the mobilization capacity of the movement, the issue I shall turn to now.

Mobilizing for Action

Mobilizing social movement action means organizing and uniting disconnected individuals into uninstitutionalized collectives, convincing people to join together to bring about or resist change (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.73-74). Stewart, Smith and Denton (2007) argue, and I agree, that the marshaling of these collectives is hindered by the American ideal for rugged individualism, suspicion of protest and social movement behavior, and the belief that U.S. institutions can effectively deal with problems once identified (p.74). Additionally, efforts to unite collectives are challenged by the diversity of material and symbolic conditions or situations that stimulate environmental sensitivity.

Over 25,000 environmental organizations in the United States originated in very different historical contexts, in response to very specific environmental issues or circumstances, and out of a specific discursive frame, such as animal rights, deep

ecology, ecofeminism and others (Brulle, 2010). An individual's discursive frames for thinking about or acting in response to environmental problems are limited to a specific category of influence since there is no "universally accepted or consistent formulation of the driving forces of environmental change" (Brulle, 2010, p. 390). This makes it more difficult for the environmental movement to craft inspiring and powerful proposals for policy change and ecological sustainability that appeal to the multiplicity of environmental frames.

The limitations of mainstream environmental discourses proposed by Brulle (2005), as noted in the previous section, also apply to the challenge of mobilization. Preservationism and Reform Environmentalism foster elite practices that limit public participation. Also, Reform Environmentalism, according to Brulle (2005), is a technocratic discourse that removes moral considerations and limits public input (p.10). The technical sphere has intruded upon the public sphere, undermining society's capacity to combat what Robert Cox refers to as communication pathologies that prevent effective societal responses to environmental distress and deterioration (Cox, 2007, p.7). Finally, by embracing technocratic ideology, important values are excluded from environmental discourse. This exclusion reduces citizen participation and perpetuates disconnection from environmental issues, significantly limiting the mobilization capacity of the movement (Brulle, 2005, p.10).

Movements working to mobilize must also pressure their opposition and gain the sympathy and support of legitimizers (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.76-77). To pressure opposition, movements must engage in lawful "symbolic combat" to gain recognition, concessions and compromises from its opponents (Stewart, Smith & Denton,

2007, p.76). Gaining sympathy and legitimacy involves provoking opposing institutions into actions that reveal their ugliness (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.77). For the environmental movement, some of its most important legitimizers, i.e. government, industry and corporations, are its most formidable opponents. A challenge arises for the movement wherein it must appeal for the help of government, industry and corporations, but also challenge them as adversaries. For example, the efforts of an environmental lobbyist for land use legislation in Washington may be hampered by negative media attention to a protester complaining about government inaction on the same issue.

However, media attention and public uproar can also aid the efforts of the lobbyist. Fortunately, "unlike most social movements, environmental conditions can create large scale incidents that have the power to shift environmental politics" (Brulle, 2010, p.400). The policy impact of dramatic incidents (Brulle, 2010) has helped the environmental movement gain critical ground in critical moments. Powerful and galvanizing events such as the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill, the Three Mile Island nuclear core meltdown, and the discovery of the hole in the ozone layer, all catalyzed public concerns and prompted hasty political action (Leiserowitz *et al*, 2006, p.437; Brulle, 2010, p.400). As these examples show, in times recognized as public crisis, the movement gained the sympathy of important legitimizers, and increased the movement's capacity to mobilize.

These appraisals suggest that mobilization, for the environmental movement, is an issue of prioritizing interests and organizing collective action at opportune times. Also, as prior appraisals of rhetorical functions of the movement in this paper imply, there is a great need for (1) agreement on the fundamental causes of environmental degradation, and (2) a values-based discourse that guides the diversity of environmental frames as the

movement seeks to mobilize different publics. A prolific understanding of the source of environmental problems can help provide a starting point for environmental solutions. Including values in this conversation helps the movement avoid the blame game, and justify criticism of important legitimizers. Leiserowitz *et al* (2006) indicate that the values that will guide a sustainability transition, such as freedom, justice, equality, and shared responsibility, are in place, but need to be prioritized above values such as free market society and globalization. Disconnected individuals can find common motivation for joining the movement's quest in a value for freedom and equality, moral high ground that places environmentalism over the hegemonic social order (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.19).

There is one important retort to the values argument that must be addressed here. Environmental campaigns that engage values take time, something the environmental movement is demonstrably short on and cannot afford to waste. This issue did not escape Tom Crompton, a change strategist with the World Wildlife Fund who wisely noted in his 2008 report that as public awareness of dramatic environmental impacts grows, "fundamental questions will be increasingly asked about the values that underpin unsustainable exploitation of the environment [and] our economic trajectories" (p.34). Crompton (2008) answers this retort by pointing out that the environmental movement will be tasked with shaping this debate, therefore engaging questions of values now will help channel such debate in positive directions "as public concern intensifies" (p.34).

The rapid shifts in policy that result from dramatic environmental incidents shows us that public concerns are an important source of credibility for the scientific evidence of environmental problems. It is important that environmentalists avoid the technocratic

pretense that experts and scientific proof are the best guides for policy-making, and instead place more emphasis on civic participation and public influence on the democratic process. As environmental problems multiply and the effects of climate change intensify, the environmental movement will have more opportunities to mobilize action fueled by public concern. The success of grassroots environmental efforts, heightening consciousness of social environmental issues, provides testament to the power of the public sphere (Silveira, 2001). By this logic, when the movement gains legitimacy in the eyes of the people, it has more power to gain validity in the eyes of legitimizing institutions and increase the capacity of the movement to mobilize resources and promote collective action.

While times of environmental crisis can be opportune moments for the environmental movement to mobilize, there must first be public recognition and appreciation for such a crisis. This issue brings us to the subject of sustaining social movement and maintaining validity as environmental degradation becomes the norm.

Sustaining the Social Movement

To sustain a social movement, Stewart, Smith and Denton (2007) argue that setbacks and delays must be justified, and the viability and visibility of the movement must be maintained (p.78-80). The strong convictions that drive movement can become the source of impatience with slow progress towards ends and goals. Attempting to defend a lack of meaningful gains requires the use of strategic persuasion to maintain order, respond to criticism from outsiders, and preserve the commitment of movement members (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p. 78). The battle to simply remain viable,

financially and otherwise, often limits the movement's ability to perform other persuasive functions (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.79). Movements attempting to sustain action must also avoid losing public presence, or becoming "out of sight, out of mind" (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.80).

A 2010 Gallup poll reported that over the last ten years, the number of Americans claiming to have a positive orientation towards the environmental movement decreased, a decline mirrored by the increased in the number of Americans claiming to be neutral or unsympathetic to the movement (Dunlap, 2010). Based on measurements of perceived impact of the environmental movement, these attitudes were shown by the poll to specifically be a result of evaluations of the environmental movement itself, rather than a result of other factors such as political polarization (Dunlap, 2010)

A movement gains the most membership and support during times of crisis (Jenkins, 1983; Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007). Unfortunately, for a great majority of society, environmental problems are no longer perceived to be a present or immanent crisis (Buell, 2004, p.76), which perhaps explains the decrease in positive orientation to the environmental movement. Environmental 'crisis' has essentially become an everyday normality, and people have begun to accommodate environmental degradation, lowering their standards for environmental health and integrity (Buell, 2004; Brulle, 2005). As people become more accustomed to the idea of environmental problems, the impetus for movement declines because the urgency of "crisis" is no longer apparent (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.79).

Accommodation of crisis is a characteristic of a society that is becoming ever more dependent on technology. Frederick Buell (2004) points out that when new

technologies are developed to solve problems, they seek social acceptance by promising to repair the damages caused by old technologies (p.161). This process, coined by Jacques Ellul, is called "accommodationism," a social process that drives society with the pleasing illusion that it has become amplified or highly evolved, making it easier for vain cultures to ignore the environmental consequences of technological development (Buell, 2004, p. 161). This builds confidence that technological solutions will always be available, so even if current solutions breed future problems, some other technology will swoop in and save the day. This attitude offloads environmental problems onto the less fortunate or future generations (Buell, 2004, p.176).

The concept of "accommodationism" is similar to what Max Oelshlaeger (1994) refers to as the paradox of environmentalism, the fact that "the global ecocrisis continues to worsen despite people's efforts to respond" (p.4). The waning success of the movement has made the development of provisional remedies acceptable instead of demanding strategic, long-term solutions. Our response to crisis as a society has become reactive, "rather than a proactive attempt to guide us to an ecologically sustainable society" (Brulle, 2005). Buell (2004) also points out a psychological problem that is an irony of environmentalism and the environmental movement: "the worse one feels environmental crisis is, the more one is tempted to turn one's back on the environment" (p.201), which results in a complete lack of action even if crisis is acutely perceived.

Sustaining the environmental social movement, therefore, is an issue of restoring urgency to the concept of environmental crisis, and adapting an appropriate response to environmental crisis. It is a high calling in a society that has largely accepted environmental degradation as a fact of life. It is because of this calling, however, that the

environmental movement must forge ahead and demand attention to the fact that crisis is *now*, not something looming in the future. We have already accepted lower standards for environmental health and beauty, and continuing on this path will create surroundings that by today's standards would be considered intolerably grotesque (Buell, 2004, p.166). This is not an apocalyptic narrative, but a very genuine reality that we must accept, embrace, and act upon.

Persuading an accommodating society to embrace the urgency and gravity of environmental crisis is a complex process. It involves political leadership, science, public pressure, catastrophes that illustrate issues, and a moral dimension involving responsibility to future generations (Tickell, 2002). This means that environmental organizations must pool resources and collectively strategize to guide a more productive social response to crisis.

Taking a multi-dimensional approach to understanding and managing crisis can help the environmental movement become "predeterministic" in forming solutions to environmental problems. To be predeterministic is to (1) understand the causal chain of events that led to the problem, and (2) consider the possible consequences of technological or other solutions to environmental problems. This approach is important for the environmental movement for several reasons. First, it can help facilitate common agreement on the fundamental causes of environmental problems. Second, solutions are shaped by broader social visions of a sustainable future (Brulle, 2005), rather than simply being better than an alternative solution. Last, the shift can help shed light on why old approaches to environmental solutions were inadequate, which can justify setbacks and delays that have thwarted the sustainability of the movement itself.

It is important to note here that the movement not belittle past efforts in attempts to justify setbacks in its history. Rather, old heroes and historic movement events can be celebrated as memorials, a key means of sustaining movement by maintaining visibility (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.80). Memorializing can also "breathe life into an aging cause," creating new heroes and more vibrant organizations that increase the viability of the movement (Stewart, Smith & Denton, 2007, p.80).

Brining new life to a struggling social movement will require the perseverance, courage and innovation of current and future environmental soldiers. Much of this work is already being engaged, and new and creative methods of rallying support and spurring action are launched every day. As the environmental movement forges onward into the 21st century, it must do so strategically, responsibly and voraciously.

A NEW VISION FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Social movements are dynamic enterprises that require revolutionary work, adaptation, and strategic intervention in the affairs of status quo society. The rhetorical tactics required to find success in this venture are not always evident, but history can provide guidance in forming successful campaigns for social change. The above analysis of the rhetorical challenges of the environmental movement is largely based on scholarly critique of the environmental movement's progress, or lack thereof, over time. There are few outright suggestions from this scholarly body of work on the environmental movement, however, on how the environmental movement should proceed into the future. As Barry Commoner said, "…none of us – singly or sitting in committee, can possibly "blueprint" a specific plan for resolving the environmental crisis…Anyone who

proposes to cure the environmental crisis undertakes thereby to change the course of history" (Brulle, 2005). As I firmly agree with Commoner on the gravity of this undertaking, the suggestions I have made, based on scholarly evaluations of the rhetorical challenges of the environmental movement, are a humble offering to a much grander scheme. Nonetheless, I hope that by way of summary of the above analysis, I may shed light on some of the most critical rhetorical objectives environmental movement must engage as it fosters a discursive shift into the future:

1. Generate agreement on the fundamental sources of environmental degradation. This objective is meant to focus the efforts of the environmental movement, prioritize interests, and prescribe courses of action. A common understanding of the source of environmental problems is an important first step in uniting the disconnected into collectives that are capable of mobilizing for action. Once united under a common agenda, collectives can focus their energy on mitigating central causes of environmental degradation and avoid losing momentum in marginal group work. This objective is especially key for the movement in conferring legitimacy and mobilization for the environmental movement.

2. Produce and project a consistent, positive, and salient social vision of a sustainable society. Much of society is wondering: if, according to environmentalists, we are not doing things right, then what does a sustainable future look like? How will it affect society? What will change about the way we live our lives and how we view the world? What must we give up and what will we gain? These are all questions the environmental movement is charged with answering with the purpose of providing a theory of transition to a more sustainable future. Though this model should convey a

broad concept of sustainable future, it must also include specifics, such as what must be done, who must take action, and how things should be accomplished. Providing a model is an opportunity to make a sustainable future seem more realistic and feasible, a new way of living a modern life that has less impact on ecological systems. A positive and specific vision can help environmental problems seem more manageable for individual actors, and allow the movement to take a predeterministic approach to formulating and carrying out solutions to environmental problems. This objective is fundamental for the environmental movement in transforming perceptions of reality and prescribing courses of action.

3. Foster a values-based discourse that guides a diversity of environmental frames towards a common agenda for social and ecological justice. Productive environmentalism is motivated by an intrinsic value for interdependence of human and natural systems. When we take on environmentally beneficial behaviors, contemporary and future society benefits as well. Solutions that formulate based on this approach create meaning and a value-added experience in doing things more sustainably. Likewise, outsiders are more likely to identify with this "brand" of environmentalism since it is grounded in values and takes moral high ground, thus garnering support for a social environmental agenda. This objective is important for transforming perceptions of reality, altering self-perceptions and mobilizing for environmental movement action.

4. Balance past, present and future frames. Calling upon history to help us recognize mistakes of the past can help us understand how to be better stewards of the earth today and into tomorrow. Celebrating past environmental victories can help rejuvenate current movement efforts. Gaining an extensive understanding of current

issues is critical for prescribing action and taking a predeterministic approach. Spreading the word about present efforts and successes can help to sustain the movement and promote mobilization. Recognizing and appreciating the future consequences of inaction can help prescribe courses of action and spur mobilization. Drawing upon each of these frames is more effective for broad social movement than leaning heavily on one.

5. Restore a sense of urgency to environmental crisis. While apocalyptic environmental narratives have lost their rhetorical strength over time, a clear setback for the movement, it is still important that the movement emphasize the urgent nature of problems such as global warming and climate change. Fear and a feeling of powerlessness against impending ruin have caused many to simply accept environmental crisis as a norm, mollifying environmental issues. Therefore, movement messages should work to re-empower those who do not believe their efforts are important, and emphasize the power of compounding individual efforts that become collective mobilization to mitigate environmental disaster. This objective can aid the movement's persuasive capacity across all six of Stewart, Smith and Denton's functions, but is most critical for transforming perceptions of reality, mobilizing for action and sustaining the movement.

6. Aid construction of an environmental discourse that is hopeful, accessible, and diverse. Many environmental problems are intimidating, and the knowledge that human systems are the root cause of these intimidating problems can leave people feeling despondent. Hence, it is important that movement messages impart a feeling of hope that we can change these systems for the benefit of the environment and humankind. Since environmental problems are human problems and the environmental crisis a human crisis, environmental degradation is the concern of all peoples. Therefore, environmentalism

must be a language that is accessible to all peoples, not a select elite or privileged few. It is for this reason that environmental discourse must also be diverse, providing a vast array of reasons to join the environmental movement, not just because it is popular or virtuous. This objective is most important for altering self-perceptions, prescribing courses of action and mobilization.

These objectives lay the foundation for a movement that depends on the combined power of individual actions. The discursive shift suggested here abandons the disconnected efforts of the movement in exchange for a unified front. Environmental organizations and groups are the voice of the environmental movement, therefore it is their responsibility to take on this rhetorical charge. Suggesting an ideological and discursive overhaul of environmentally destructive culture is risky business, therefore environmental organizations ready to engage this vision are in need of tools to aid them in this undertaking.

It is here that I propose such a tool. Of the many vehicles available for communicating volatile and challenging messages, none has seen more success than the mighty medium of documentary film. Documentary film is a pragmatic art that possesses the gathering power of entertainment and the educational rhetorical power of images, sounds and words. Certain documentary films also have the ability to create a space for activism, provide a sense of agency, and become a mobilizing catalyst of social movement.

METHOD AND ARTIFACT

DOCUMENTARY FILM AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT

Film possesses the exceptional ability to transport us to new places, play with our imaginations, test our senses, challenge our conceptions, educate us and entertain. Film can transform our realities for hours at a time. It can push our boundaries of thought and experience, and introduce us to people and places we never imagined we would meet. And sometimes, film can alter our worldview, challenge our assumptions about how our world works, and move us to change our selves and the world around us. Film has become a significant cultural text in the contemporary public sphere, a medium for producing meaning, informing cultural language and codes, and even performing civic functions.

Fictional films such as *Avatar*, *Philadelphia*, *Hotel Rwanda* and *Erin Brockovich*, the latter of which were based on actual events, have demonstrated the ability of popular film to raise awareness of social and political problems and even promote social change. However, non-fiction films have become an ever more popular tool for raising awareness of real-life issues, and calling specific individuals and groups to action. The powerful genre of documentary film goes beyond entertainment and fictional representations to become a cinematic tradition of documenting reality and transporting messages to unwitting audiences. Unlike fictional films, documentary films that expose reality make issues more palpable and perhaps even more personal, and act as an organizing tool, providing an "outlet for people to listen up, speak out and take the initiative for positive change" (Smithline, 2005). Such films utilize depictions of the natural sublime, moving narratives, and shocking footage among other strategies, bringing environmental

messages closer to audiences in creative, artistic ways. Documentary film has become an art form for the masses, a delivery system for persuasion, perspective, propaganda, art, realism and culture. Utilized by governments, activists, educators and business, documentary film has become more than a form of entertainment, and holds great potential for influencing social change in unique and strategic ways.

The role of documentary film in social movement has made it a popular and significant artifact for communication scholars analyzing media, visual rhetoric, and the implications for culture and pedagogy (Opel, 2007). As documentary filmmakers increasingly focus on environmental issues, film becomes a substantial force in shaping our understanding of environmental issues and solutions. Documentary films can reflect and intensify existing environmental discourse (Rosteck & Frentz, 2009), disrupt social myths (Lindenfeld, 2010) and articulate new ideas about environmental activism and agency (Monani, 2008). As documentary films gain popularity and notoriety, these messages are reaching a wider audience, which warrants attention by communication scholars looking to understand the complexities of environmental discourse and the ways it is interpreted (Rosteck & Frentz, 2009).

Not all documentary films are catalysts for social movement, however. Though documentary film is meant to be a depiction of real people, places and events, it is nonetheless influenced by the ideology and style of the filmmakers and subject to the interpretation of complex and critical audiences. Likewise, the growing popularity of documentary film requires filmmakers to compete with other messages and strategically select rhetorical tactics that offer a dominant voice to their cause. This study seeks to understand which rhetorical strategies posses the greatest capacity for addressing the

rhetorical challenges of the environmental movement. Having identified what the main rhetorical challenges of the movement are, there is a firm basis from which to approach analysis of the rhetorical strategies of environmental documentary films. This study will examine two films to determine to what extent they contribute to the rhetorical objectives necessary for fostering the discursive shift needed in the environmental movement. Specifically, my analysis will be driven by determining the extent to which these films:

1. *Generate agreement on the fundamental sources of environmental degradation*
2. *Produce and project a consistent, positive and salient social vision of a sustainable society*
3. *Foster a values-based discourse that guides a diversity of environmental frames towards a common agenda for social and ecological justice*
4. *Balance past, present and future frames*
5. *Restore a sense of urgency to environmental crisis*
6. *Aid construction of an environmental discourse that is hopeful, accessible and diverse*

The study will compare the two films based on their overall success or failure to perform these rhetorical objectives, and demonstrate how certain rhetorical strategies are more successful than others in promoting movement.

In the tradition of rhetorical criticism, my analysis will look at the relatability of characters, the resonance of narratives, the visual rhetorical value of moving and still images, and film editing choices that dictate how the message develops throughout the film. While the analysis of rhetorical strategies will focus primarily on the films themselves, this study applies the coalition model for assessing documentaries (Whiteman, 2004), taking into consideration the production and distribution process as well as the activists and resources surrounding these films that transport the message beyond the screen. Whitman (2004) points out that typically, film analysis is guided by a narrow, individualistic enquiry of the impact of a finished film (p.51). The coalition

model, however, provides a framework for a more holistic understanding of the nature of documentary impact (Whiteman, 2004, p.67).

Dozens of environmental documentary films are made each year addressing myriad environmental issues and concerns. In choosing documentaries for this study I was looking for films that had messages that used multiple strategies that appeal to and resonate with a wider audience, rather than leaning too heavily one persuasive strategy. I was also looking for films that engaged mobilization efforts external to the film and provided resources for viewers seeking further information and involvement. While the films chosen for this study share the former characteristics, the type and level of response from the media and general public was different for each, which lent to their success in ways that warrant closer examination. Finally, each film has a different approach, tone, and ethos, and each film looks at different environmental issues, which brings variety to my analysis and demonstrates the diversity of strategies available to address varying environmental causes.

For this study, I chose to look at *Food Inc.* (Kenner, 2008) and *Bag It* (Bareza, 2010), two films that look at very specific environmental issues using very different strategies. Initial viewings of each of these films yield very different impressions. My initial reaction to Food, Inc. is that it offers important information about a serious problem present within our society, but lacks a broad social vision for a sustainable society while relying on vilification of important legitimizers to promote urgency and mobilization. Though themes of social and ecological justice are quite evident, a productive discourse gets lost amidst the negative tone that dominates the larger message. Viewers are left with "food for thought" but are unlikely to be inspired by the solutions

suggested as the credits roll that seem somewhat disproportionate to the problems raised by the film itself. The resources that accompany the film are seem removed from the production itself, however they certainly keep the conversation going and provides plenty of outlets for those willing to access them. My initial impression of Bag It, on the other hand, is that by taking on an enormous environmental problem in a "lighthearted" way, the message resonates with a wide audience and environmental problems that were once unnoticed seem manageable instead of inevitable. The film interprets the plastics crisis in such a way that the multiple levels of change necessary to solve the problem seem accessible and foster a positive discourse about how to approach and be involved in environmental issues. Though not all people may relate to the humorous main character in the film, values for social and environmental justice are central to the message and prompt the viewer to be a part of the change necessary to address issues related to plastics and other unsustainable consumption. The resources that accompany the film continue to encourage audiences to take on the difficult behavior changes and challenge institutions that support unsustainable use of plastic.

Each of these films has experienced popular success in different entertainment arenas and in front of different audiences, a fact that should not be dismissed. Audiences attending documentaries at traditional movie theaters are presumably persuaded differently than those who attend film festivals and independent community screenings. For the purposes of this study, however, it is important to identify what messages are more likely to convince audience members to join the conversation or take on the work of the environmental movement in a more general sense, regardless of whether or not viewers join the specific cause to which the film is devoted. Building a comprehensive

understanding of the persuasive power of each film requires deeper criticism and analysis.

Ultimately, this study aims to identify a genre of environmental documentary film that most instrumental for environmental organizations using film to educate, empower, and mobilize the work of the environmental movement. The following study was constructed in the following way: First, analysis of these two films identifies the types of film strategies that accomplish the rhetorical objectives outlined above, as well as explaining why other strategies fail to do so. Second, I present a list of guidelines for identifying social movement genre films to provide direction for environmental organizations looking to utilize such films. Finally, I will briefly make suggestions about *how* organizations can use this genre of film for starting discussions and mobilizing action within communities.

ANALYSIS

FOOD, INC. FOR THOUGHT: A MEDIATED COLLOQUY ON PROBLEMS

Food Inc. is an Academy Award nominated documentary by Robert Kenner (2008) that sets out to "lift the veil" on the American food system and expose the problems the system creates for farmers, workers, economies, politics, personal health and the environment. Through interviews with corporate and independent farmers, interviews with victims of food toxicity and economic systems, and ample shocking "behind the scenes" footage of modern food production, Kenner reveals the industrialized and politicized underbelly of the business of feeding America. Featuring interviews with authors Michael Pollan (*The Omnivore's Dillemma*) and Eric Schlosser (*Fast Food Nation*), *Food Inc*. attempts to help the average American understand where our food

really comes from and the way the food system dictates how food is produced. Kenner reveals the economic and health consequences that are a result of food system bureaucracy, and how average citizens can be a part of changing the system.

Electing corporate distribution rather than independent release, *Food, Inc.* has been viewed by millions of people worldwide. Released in 2009 by Magnolia Pictures, *Food, Inc.* grossed over $4 million at the box office (IMDB) and as of August of 2010, sold over 324,000 DVDs (The Numbers). The official website for the film, aptly named "Hungry for Change," provides multiple resources including educational materials, a reading list, a list of NGO "allies," and a link to the Hungry for Change blog hosted by TakePart, a digital platform that hosts resources for multiple social-change documentaries. Well reviewed by many critics, audience reception was mixed; some praising the film for bravely confronting America's corrupt food system, and others criticizing it for attacking agriculture and misleading viewers about conventional modern food production.

Food, Inc. primarily engages the persuasive functions of transforming perceptions of reality, legitimizing movement, and altering self-perceptions. By exposing the "hidden" practices of the food industry and the motives behind such practices, the film aims to help viewers gain a better understanding of how society is manipulated by industry. Introducing organic farmers and corporate leaders interested in restoring health to the system, the film attempts to legitimize efforts to change the flawed food system. Finally, by showing us that we have been lied to and cheated by "the system," the film pushes the viewer to reflect on their own behaviors, and attempts to empower those offended by the system to change it. These strategies accomplish some rhetorical

objectives to a certain extent, but fall short on others. In general, *Food, Inc.* operates as more of a mediated narrative about a social issue rather than a catalyst for environmental movement.

A BROAD CRITIQUE: FOOD AND ENVIRONMENT

Glancing at the DVD case of *Food, Inc.*, one could find themselves fearing what they might see when they press play. Quotes litter the case, touting the film to be "The most effective environmental documentary since *An Inconvenient Truth*," that "You'll never look at dinner the same way again," and "It might change your life." It is an intimidating introduction to a film that tackles an intimidating subject, perhaps an appropriate first impression for a documentary that no doubt enlightens the viewer on the seriousness of the problems associated with the American food system.

Unfortunately, the intimidating nature of the film is likely to leave the viewer intimidated as well. The film's thorough investigation of the glaring problems with the food system leaves little time for investigation of current or possible solutions. This imbalance of problems and solutions leaves the viewer with little confidence that the solutions they are provided with are adequate tools for change in the face of such a formidable issue. The film does address sources of [food system] degradation, values for social and ecological justice and issues related to the urgency of the food crisis. Successes regarding these three objectives are overshadowed, however, by the lack of social vision, imbalance of past, present and future frames, and narrow audience appeal.

Before exploring this critique in more detail, it is important to briefly address why *Food, Inc.* is an environmental documentary and why the problems with the American

food system are environmental problems. First of all, we don not often think of food as a natural resource, but in essence it is. Animals, crops, and the land they occupy are all resources that have limits and operate under the rules of their natural ecosystems. To a certain extent, *Food, Inc.* spends time talking about how the food system pushes these limits. Second, because food is an integral part of human health, some of the problems with the food system, such as food-borne illness and subsidized unhealthy calories, become issues of environmental justice. Also, because the food industry has become concentrated and specialized, i.e. controlled by a only few large corporations, mass production and distribution of food generates exponentially more carbon emissions than localized systems.

As Lindenfeld (2010) points out, *Food, Inc.* "adopts and anthropocentric perspective on food that relegates environmental issues into peripheral status" (p.381). The "broad-reaching critique" that *Food, Inc.* employs by focusing on multiple issues does keep the audience engaged and entertained (Lindenfeld, 2010), but avoids a direct focus on the *environmental* consequences of modern food production. This would not necessarily be a problem except that many of the suggestions the film provides for changing the food system are specific about addressing environmental problems caused by economically motivated food production. Perhaps the filmmakers expected the audience to be made up of people who are capable of making the connection from the anthropocentric problems associated with the food system to the environmental problems with the food system. I would argue that the message of the film targets a wide audience, and reached the "environmental" crowd with great success, but missed the opportunity to

help a wider demographic make the connection between human and environmental consequences of industrial food production.

This argument is based on my observation of how the film framed its message about the industrialized American food system. From the gate, *Food, Inc.* is a film about "lifting the veil" that resides between the conventional image of agrarian America as the wholesome source of our food, and the actual image of the American food industry, one that is controlled by a small group of corporations that produce food in maximum-efficiency factories (Kenner, 2008). There is equal focus on what resides behind the veil and the veil itself. Behind the veil, unhealthy and unethical practices are exposed in an effort to get the audience to re-think what food they eat, where they buy it and what they should take into account when making choices about food. The veil itself is perhaps even more complicated. The film asserts that the veil is an intentional effort by corporations to divert our attention away from the ugly reality of industrial food production. Essentially the veil is not just about hiding ugly truth about the food industry, it is also about how the food industry defines what we as American citizens are allowed to say and do when it comes to food choices.

The intentional choice of the filmmakers to focus on the "veil," the systematic deception of the American consumer, is clearly an attempt to provoke indignation in the viewer that subsequently motivates them to change the way they consume food. Though these intentions are admirable, a focus on the use of rhetorical devices such as shocking footage, victims of food-borne illness and casualties of corporate takeover to produce indignation alone are not enough to push viewers to transform their shopping and eating habits. More importantly, the film fails to perform several of the rhetorical objectives

identified to be essential for the current needs of the environmental social movement. The following analysis of film strategies explains in more detail what film strategies became successful objectives, and which strategies led the film to fall short of social movement mobilization.

IN THE DETAILS: FIGHTING GOLIATH

Food, Inc. is divided into nine sections that address four basic subjects: (1) sources of problems in the industrial food system; (2) what those problems are; (3) the consequences of those problems; and (4) how some are doing things differently. The first section, titled "Fast Food to All Food," points at the rising fast food industry of the 1970s, specifically McDonald's, as the main catalyst that took food production from thousands of smaller, local farms and food processing businesses, to the large industrial food system run by "a handful of companies" (Kenner, 2008). It is here that we meet author Eric Schlosser, and are first introduced to a recurring theme that dominates our impression of the industrialized food system: efficiency and profit. The industry's focus on increasing efficiency to make more money changed the perception, says Schlosser, of what it meant to be an animal used to produce food products and what it means to be a farmer. For example, in the words of National Chicken Council representative Richard Lobb, "in a way we're not producing chickens, we're producing food" (Kenner, 2008), a statement that illustrates the way the food production industry chose to answer the demands of the fast food industry. There was a marked shift in the values of the industry, and it was at this time that the "veil" began to be lowered.

The way the film addresses the issue of fast food raised a number of questions for me as a viewer. As the practices of McDonald's began to demand centralization on the food industry, why didn't the public object? Why did we allow food quality standards to go down, and why did we essentially ignore the lowering of the "veil?" The film does not address these questions, which essentially leaves the impact of society out instead of inspiring the viewer to take a critical look at the role of the public sphere during this shift. This allows the *Food, Inc.* viewer to remain passive, rather than interpreting the role of individuals during a important shift in the food system. By omitting this critique, the film misses an opportunity to talk about an important source of environmental degradation: the citizen. By submitting to the changes in the food industry, i.e. mass production and centralization, citizens allowed the industry to proceed without being accountable to the consumer.

Perhaps the filmmakers were being careful not to offend the viewer by assigning blame to the naïve or ignorant consumer, or perhaps they were trying not to nullify the larger message about the "veil" rendering the consumer "innocent." Later in the film an independent organic farmer does at least ask the question: *why did we allow ourselves to become disconnected and ignorant?* However, the "Fast Food to All Food" section was a critical point in the film for addressing the social conditions that allowed for the major changes in the food industry in the 1970s, an opportunity the filmmakers passed up possibly in exchange for audience acceptance. While the film does a good job of addressing sources of environmental degradation in other sections of the film, it falls short of achieving an important goal in this instance.

After discussion of fast food as a source of changes in the food industry, the second section, titled "A *Corn*ucopia of Choices," goes into detail about the extensive use of corn and "clever rearrangements of corn" in food products and animal feed (Kenner, 2008). While recognizing that the science and ingenuity behind corn and soy-based food engineering is impressive, the film points out two major consequences of the practice: (1) using corn as animal feed increasingly results in food-borne illness; and (2) the illusion of diversity. Discussion about the former stimulates an important conversation about values and prioritizing human health over efficiency, an essential part of fostering a discourse rooted in social and ecological justice, a point I will address in more depth later on. Discussion about the "illusion of diversity," however, is brief and undefined.

The illusion of diversity is experienced at the American supermarket, where consumers are led to believe that they have the freedom of choice between, on average, 47,000 different products, which makes us think those products come from thousands of different producers and raw materials. In reality, according to author Michael Pollan in the film, there are only a few companies involved and only a few crops involved, and a good majority of those products can be traced back to a cornfield in Iowa. What Michael Pollan and *Food, Inc.* do not explain, however, is *why* this lack of diversity is bad. The well-educated viewer, or Pollen reader, may quickly deduce the economic and health consequences of such a centralized system, but the film misses an opportunity here to dissect the problem in such a way that a vision of a better system can be modeled. Why is overproduction bad and "over subsidizing" bad? What is wrong with eating engineered foods? What is bad about producing crops below the cost of production? Most important, how should we be doing things differently? What does a more

sustainable and ecologically just system look like? The film breezes past this conversation to focus on the third section where the loss of a child to food-borne illness becomes the human-interest story of the film, a choice likely made to introduce pathos and appeal to the emotions of the viewer. While the latter is certainly an important element of the film, and in some ways illustrates a key consequence of a lack of diversity in the food system, the brief and hurried discussion about the illusion of diversity misses the opportunity to provide a social vision for a sustainable future and lay out a set of objectives that will be a result of the changes to the current food system.

The second section does offer an understanding of the role of government as a source of environmental degradation, or at least a source of the problems in the food system. Government policies such as the Farm Bill, or the "Food Bill" as Pollen defines it, protect corporate interests over economic diversity and health regulations. Under these protections, the industry becomes bigger and more problems arise, an issue that serves as the film's transition to the third section, "Unintended Consequences," where we meet Barbara Kowalcyk. Barbara is a middle-aged mother whose 2-year old son Kevin died 12 days after eating a hamburger contaminated with E. coli 0157-h7, a product that was not recalled until 18 days after Kevin's death. Our contact with Barbara occurs during her visit to Washington D.C. to speak with politicians about food safety regulations. Here the film continues to add building blocks to a values-based discourse with an agenda for environmental justice. Barbara is a self-proclaimed conservative who never imagined becoming a food safety advocate, or how this work would transform her relationship with her mother, her partner in food safety advocacy. Barbara's narrative allows the plainest of viewers to identify with her situation as an average American mom

who never envisioned being involved in politics, and we deeply sympathize with her when we hear the heartbreaking story of Kevin's death. A clear set of values presents itself here, including the right of a child to safe and healthy food, the responsibility of the food industry and government to ensure that right, and the need for everyday people to be involved in the process.

Though the film hits the target in performing the rhetorical objective of fostering a values-based discourse, it falls short of using this opportunity to project a social vision by talking about how the Kowalcyk family has changed their food consumption habits. We learn later, however, that Barbara is hesitant to talk about this for fear of liability under veggie-libel laws that that allow food companies to sue anyone who criticizes their practices. The final part of this third section at least provides a vision of what the food system should *not* look like when we are transported to the Beef Products Inc. (BPI) factory, "a marriage of science and technology" where a vast network of machines coordinated by a NASA-like control center produces "hamburger meat filler that's been cleansed with ammonia to kill E. coli" (Kenner, 2008). Through the narrative of the BPI founder and shocking images of inedible-looking food materials we learn that the goal of the operation is clearly competition and profit, not quality. Additionally, these scenes illustrate the tendency of the industry to find technological fixes "that allow the system to survive" instead of working backwards to see what is wrong with the system itself (Kenner, 2008).

Thus far, the film is building a solid argument against the practices of the industrial food system, but has not necessarily engaged rhetorical objectives that have the potential to get the viewer involved and take action to change the system. The viewer

understands that the food system has changed for the worse, but may not have a good grasp on what it looked like when it was better, or how we can revert back to or progress towards safer and healthier systems. This lack of social vision is problematic, as is the way the consumer has been left out of the food system equation, leaving the viewer unaware of his or her impact on the food system and consequent power to change it. The film has begun to foster a discourse about the types of values that should shape our food system, but we are not sure how those values can guide a change or what that change looks like. Some of these issues are addressed later in the film, but as I will argue later on, they seem overshadowed by the breadth of the problems and leave the viewer feeling somewhat powerless and the rhetorical objectives unfulfilled.

Section four of the film takes a similar approach as the past sections, going into further detail on the consequences of the food system without showing us what the alternative should look like. In "The Dollar Menu," we meet the Gonzales family, a prime example of the consequences of a skewed food system. A low-income family with two children and parents who work over 12 hours a day, the Gonzales family can either spend their dollar on an unhealthy-yet-filling fast food drive-thru hamburger, or try to find something cheap at the grocery store that is quick and filling. The convenience and affordability of fast food has made such a lifestyle possible for many American families, but has resulted in serious health problems such as the steep climb in cases of diabetes and obesity. The latter problem has led families like the Gonzales's to make yet another difficult choice: the choice between spending money on diabetes medicine or healthy food.

This section makes a clear point about the social and health dilemmas that result from the industrialized food system, and the magnitude of these problems is nothing less than alarming. Presented with the immense implications of these problems, the brief amount of time spent on this subject is surprising; however, it does bring up several important elements of an environmental justice agenda based in family values. But again, an opportunity is missed for creating a social vision for a more equitable food system. There was an opportunity here to go beyond the indictment of the system and actually suggest how equal access to healthy food could work.

Luckily, section five introduces us to a different system as represented by Polyface Farms and its proprietor, Joel Salatin. In this section, called "In The Grass," the outspoken Salatin summarizes the problems with the veil that shields the industrialized food system, including the loss of accountability, the phenomenon of disconnected consumers, and the shift from farmers to technicians as the professionals of the food industry. This monologue occurs against the backdrop of Polyface farms, an organic farm that looks more like the standard depiction of agrarian America we are used to, with grass-fed beef, pigs and chickens, open-air production, and farm boys in overalls and ball caps. Though the film seems to be presenting a social vision for an alternative to the industrial food system here, the discussion is still about problems, and the pastoral scene at Polyface is essentially a tactical transition to the shocking footage of industrial pork production at the Smithfield hog processing plant.

At Smithfield we are not only disturbed and offended by hidden camera footage of the assembly line-style slaughter and butchering of squealing pigs, we are introduced to some of the worst human rights issues associated with the food system yet. While the

U.S. government turns a blind eye, meatpacking plants lure immigrants to work low-paying, highly dangerous jobs where they are barely treated better than the animals themselves. When the government does get involved, amidst an anti-immigrant movement they attack the workers, rather than the companies who illegally employ them.

Even the most critical viewer would be haunted by the scenes at the Smithfield plant. Rather than walking away from the film inclined to protest unethical pork production and worker treatment, the most significant takeaway for the simplest viewer might be these horrifying scenes. Thankfully, the articulate Salatin returns at the end of section five to draw conclusions about the serious cultural implications of such a system in one of my favorite quotes of the film:

> *"A culture that views a pig as a protoplasmic pile of inanimate structure to be manipulated by whatever creative design the human can foist on that critter will probably view individuals within its community and other cultures in the community of nations with the same type of disdain, and disrespect, and controlling type mentality."*

Salatin's point is that not enough people are asking, "*Why do we allow our food system to be like this?"* This is a key question that can build upon a values-based discourse. Seeing the scenes at Smithfield at least helps us question our own values about what we are willing to sacrifice for a package of cheap bacon and other such food products.

Section six, "Hidden Costs," keeps this conversation about values afloat, and even hints at a social vision when Salatin again speaks up to express his goals as an organic farmer: "meet the need without compromising the integrity." We even meet a Polyface customer who drove 500 miles for Polyface products. Awkwardly, we are met with a contradiction to this message as we are whisked away from the pastoral Polyface farms that laughs in the face of economic growth to a natural products expo, where people are

attempting to work within the capitalist model and provide affordable, healthy, safe foods for the everyday consumer.

This shift introduces a contradiction of messages in the film. Amidst a sea of problems with the industrialized food system, Polyface Farms is presented as a solution: local, organic food produced, processed and packaged honestly, healthily and sustainably. The ever-present theme of "profit" as the motive of the industry has thus far been cast as a primary villain. But then we meet Gary Hirshberg of Stonyfield Farms, who says we are not going to get rid of capitalism in time to solve problems like climate change, therefore we need to be much more urgent. I appreciate what Hirshberg's statement does to lend a sense of urgency to a larger environmental crisis. However, he claims that if business is the *source* of the problem, business can be the solution. This contradicts the argument for more than half the film about economic motivations as the *source* of problems associated with the industrial food system. Organic options in supermarkets are no doubt a benefit to the consumer and their health (a point that is never explained in the film), but the question must be asked: if organics become competitive, will they become compromised? In addition, if the price of organic food limits access, is it really an adequate solution for a system that is already inequitable?

One important argument made by Hirshberg is that we do not have time to wait for change to come in the form of all consumers buying food only from the perfect system within 100 miles. Hirshberg's point again does a good job of explaining the urgency of the food crisis, and his solution in the form of organic supermarket products could help the viewer feel that good solutions are within grasp. The contradiction

between social justice problems and inequitable solutions still exists, however, and could leave the viewer confused about the potential of organics.

Sections seven and eight, "From Seed to Supermarket" and "The Veil" respectively, both take a closer look at the federal government and the justice system as a source of environmental degradation. We learn that centralized control of food starts all the way back at the seed. According to the U.S. Supreme Court, genetically modified seeds can be patented, and those who violate such patents can be prosecuted. Another human-interest story arises here. Farmers who have saved seeds for generations to replant at the beginning of each season are suddenly treated like criminals if nature decides to blow a genetically modified seed into their field. Advocates who speak out against unhealthy and unethical food production are prosecuted under veggie-libel and cheeseburger laws. In Washington, politicians who worked for the food industry support corporate agendas. We gain a more distinct sense of the skewed values of a system that prioritizes financial gain over social ethics.

At this point in the film, the problems begin to feel overwhelming. Of the hour and twenty minutes that have passed in the film, only eight minutes have been spent talking about solutions. While it is important to talk about the problems and educate the viewer on the issue, the choice to pile the problems up and spend a few minutes at the conclusion of the film making statements about how to change the system reduces the likelihood that the viewer will walk away feeling empowered to enact a change. Also, while the film is very informative about how the problems arose and why they exist, there is a lack of critical commentary that says, "this is how the food system *should* be, this is

how the food system *should* look." Instead the viewer is left feeling that the industrial food system is in many ways impenetrable.

THE VERDICT: PROBLEMS UNVEILED, SOLUTIONS EVASIVE

The seven remaining minutes of the film begins with section nine, "Shocks to the System." Finally the film starts to talk about the threats to the industrial food system, such as dependence on petroleum, a limited resource with soaring prices; and media criticism during food outbreaks that prompts consumers to reflect on their food choices. A ray of hope ekes through after a long barrage of ominous problems. The point is almost lost in its brevity, however. The section is only two minutes long.

As the film concludes, a few minutes are finally spent outlining a vision of a different system. Hirshberg points out that consumer choices create the demand in supermarkets and puts the power in the hands of the people, which has led to some key changes in the food system such as elimination of dangerous growth hormones. Pollan suggests that policy changes are needed to make healthy food more affordable than unhealthy food. Schlosser uses a comparison to victories against powerful tobacco companies to encourage us that the battle against powerful food industry can be fought and won as well. Salatin asks us to define success in terms of sending fewer people to the hospital with food-borne illness this year. Barbara Kowalczyk asks that instead of pitying her, we simply listen up and help her affect a change. And finally, corn farmer Troy Rouche promises that if we demand more wholesome food, farmers will deliver. It is a refreshing end to an otherwise intimidating message.

Just before the credits for *Food, Inc.* roll, suggestions for how you can personally change the food system begin to appear on a black screen. It seems to me a meager effort, especially considering the fact that many viewers leave their seats when the screen goes black after the last scene. In addition, some of these messages either seem disconnected from the issues in the film. For example, one suggestion is to choose foods that are in season when you go to the supermarket. The importance of eating seasonally was never explained in the film, and almost seems out of place here. Other suggestions definitely fit in, and all the suggestions are good ones, but this last minute effort to send the viewer home feeling empowered is tenuous.

In shaping this analysis as a master narrative of the film, my intent is to show how the choices made by the filmmakers impact the ultimate effect of the film. Failing to take advantage of opportunities to articulate a social vision and future frames at multiple points throughout the film, the problems build up and seem impenetrable. A hopeful discourse is all but absent; solutions are not adapted to different contexts; and viewers are left wondering if the efforts of individuals are adequate for addressing the magnitude of problems presented.

CONCLUSION: MEDIATED CONVERSATION, MINIMAL MOVEMENT

In sum, the strengths of *Food, Inc.* as related to the rhetorical objectives for promoting movement are the conversations about sources of environmental degradation, and conversations that build a values-based discourse. The film also scratches the surface of returning a sense of urgency to environmental crisis by utilizing shocking footage that informs us about just how bad the situation is, and articulating the need for urgent

solutions . The film falls short on the remaining objectives, however, and there are limitations to the successful objectives.

Generate agreement on the fundamental sources of environmental degradation. *Food, Inc.* wisely points to several groups and institutions that play a role in supporting systems that ultimately produce environmental harm, including the fast food industry, the federal government, industrial food corporations, regulatory agencies and the justice system. Another source of the problem is the purely economic motivations of the industry that are prioritized above workers' rights and human health standards. The success of this objective is limited, however, when the film avoids a conversation about the role of everyday people and consumers in supporting the faulty food system, despite a distinct opportunity for exposure. Though the role of the consumer in changing the system is touched upon, the film does not challenge the viewer to think critically about their own behaviors have contributed to the problems with the food system. The consumer is an important source of the problem, and refraining from engaging this conversation potentially allows the consumer-viewer to feel less involved and void of responsibility.

Produce and project a consistent, positive, and salient social vision of a sustainable society. Joel Salatin and Polyface Farms provide a few glimpses of a social vision through scenes of the sustainable practices at Polyface and Salatin's expression of the admirable goals, values and ethics that motivate his venture. Many of the scenes in the film emphasize what the food system should *not* look like through shocking footage of factory production of meat products and controversial statements from industry professionals. The final five minutes of the film also provide brief guidance for a social

vision. But the film fails to capitalize on a considerable number of opportunities to present a model for a more sustainable food system.

Foster a values-based discourse that guides a diversity of environmental frames towards a common agenda for social and ecological justice. The film most definitely articulates a broad set of values that can build a discourse sensitive to social and ecological justice. Whether these values reach a diverse audience is debatable, and depends largely on the viewing context. The film also makes the assumption that viewers already possess the "correct" set of values that will guide the viewer's understanding of how the values, ethics and even morals of the food industry have become skewed. Also, social justice issues are largely ignored in the film's brief depiction of a "better" system when it investigates the rise of organic consumer products.

Balance past, present and future frames. This film leans heavily on the past and present frames, focusing on how problems were created and what the current consequences look like. There is a lack of emphasis on a future frame that points out what the consequences of inaction will be and how the future can be different and better. The narratives about what a farmer and a meatpacker used to be could have spilled over into an explanation of what the future farmer should look like. Present practices of the industry, government, regulatory agencies and justice system are criticized, but there is little conversation about what future consequences are breeding as these practices continue. The lack of balance of these frames also contributes to the heavy nature of the problems overshadowing the solutions.

Restore a sense of urgency to environmental crisis. Raising the veil is an interesting way of engendering a sense of urgency. The shocking truth behind the

curtain, especially on the chicken farms and factories, commercial feed operations and meat packing plants, exposes a harsh reality we may rather ignore but may somehow feel compelled to change. Though the viewer may not know how to directly enact that change at the end of this film, they likely have developed a strong feeling that such practices cannot continue. Unfortunately, if the viewer ultimately perceives the problems as intimidating, they may turn their backs on the issues in exchange for ignorant bliss.

Aid construction of an environmental discourse that is hopeful, accessible, and diverse. There is very little hopeful discourse in this film, which comes as no surprise since the focus of the film is on the extent of key problems. This does allow moments of hope to shine through, however, such as the visit to Polyface Farms and the effort to make organic products more accessible. The set of values presented as a basis for creating a more equitable, healthy and sustainable food system is a good foundation for building an environmental discourse that is accessible and diverse, but there are limitations to the film's effort. First, we visit only one local farm, see only a few seconds of a farmer's market, and are not made aware of the local food and slow food movements that have gained momentum in the last decade. More time in different contexts may have made some of the messages more salient for a wider audience. Also, our contact with the Gonzales family, who represent an important slice of the population adversely effected by the industrial food system, is too brief, which makes their issues seem less significant than others when it certainly is not.

The external resources of the film address a much greater diversity of issues and contexts, however. TakePart.com, a division of *Food, Inc.* producer Participant Media, was the original *Food, Inc.* online resource when the film debuted. Today it mainly

encourages visitors to redirect to the film's official website, FoodIncMovie.com. Here visitors "hungry for change" can read more about the issues addressed in the film, access educational materials and a reading list, find tips for how to get involved and take action and connect with the film's Facebook page. The Facebook page contains daily posts that look at issues from what to put in your child's lunchbox to what is happening with the farm bill. It is a great place to remain abreast of the food issues in the U.S. and become part of a continuing conversation. Both sites emphasize ways to take action in ways that the film overlooks. The film's resources are definitely good extensions of the film's message, but unless the film inspires people in the first place to seek out these resources, their impact is limited.

Food, Inc. set out to lift the veil on the food industry, and most definitely succeeded in doing so. However, the potential of this film to promote social movement is limited in many ways because the emphasis on problems and lack of salient alternatives has the potential to leave the viewer feeling helpless and intimidated. Though this film was seen by significantly more people than the average documentary, failures and shortcomings on key rhetorical objectives make the issue seem unmanageable and damage the ability of this film to promote social movement.

ANALYSIS

BAGGING BAD HABITS: ACCESSING A LIFE LESS PLASTIC

Bag It is the story of average-Joe Jeb Barrier who decides to stop using plastic bags from the grocery store and finds himself taking a more critical look at plastic consumption and its negative impacts on environmental and personal health. In *Bag It,*

Jeb investigates how the use of plastic bags became a cultural norm, the surprising side effects of plastic bag production and disposal, the alternatives to plastic bags being pursued worldwide, and the chemical and material consequences of plastic consumption and disposal for our landfills, oceans, and children. *Bag It* lightheartedly provides the knowledge needed to think differently about how we should make, use, reuse, and recycle plastics.

Reel Thing, a film company founded by *Bag It* director Suzane Bareza, independently released the film in 2010 on the documentary film circuit. Winner of multiple audience choice and other film festival awards, *Bag It* has thrived on private bookings at independent theaters, art houses and venues across the nation, and enjoyed multiple screenings on public television during the spring of 2011. BagItMovie.com provides easy steps to find or host a screening, a link to the active Bag It blog and resources for educators, including a 22-page curriculum education packet. The DVD product itself, embodying the principle "practice what you preach," is packaged in a case made of PaperFoam, a 100% biodegradable and recyclable alternative to plastic that creates 85-90% less carbon emissions than plastic (Bereza & Hill). Reviews reported that movie-goers assumed the film to be another slice of environmental propaganda prior to viewing, but were pleased to find the film informative and entertaining, if somewhat amateur as a production. The film primarily engages the persuasive function of transforming perceptions of reality; however, it puts effort toward the other five functions in multiple ways. Showing us the plastics system from production to use to disposal provides a critical understanding of one-use products of all kinds, and exposes environmentally degrading corporate and financial motives to the uninformed viewer.

The film also investigates the ways in which individuals, groups and communities are fighting back against chemical companies and plastic lobbies. In contrast to *Food, Inc.*, the strategy of demonstrating alternatives provides a vision of sustainability that makes action an obvious next step for *Bag It* viewers.

A BROAD CRITIQUE: SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

There are a number of strategies employed in this film that succeed in performing all six rhetorical objectives for promoting movement. First, the use of a friendly, humorous and relatable central character appeals to a diverse audience, addresses values, and keeps the tone of the film light and entertaining rather than confrontational and accusatory. Second, the structure of the film separates the issues into seven sections that each address sub-topics thoroughly from problem to solution. This approach balances frames, addresses values and restores urgency while making problems seem manageable. Providing closure on issues in each separate section of the film helps the viewer maintain a sense of hope throughout the film and employs the strategy of repetition to ensure that the viewer leaves the film equipped with tools for change. Third, sustainable alternatives and advice are demonstrated throughout the film, which makes a model for change more salient for the viewer.

Right from the gate the point of this film is clear: plastic is seemingly everywhere, it is doing bad things to our environment, and it needs to be dealt with. There is no contesting that *Bag It* is a film about a distinctly environmental problem, evidenced by a footage collage of plastic littering cities, landfills, beaches, rivers, canals, oceans, and wrapped precariously around wildlife. Right away we learn what this film will be about

as protagonist Jeb Barrier asks what "disposable" means; where plastic goes when we throw it away and what "away" means; why plastic is in everything and what that means for our environment; and whether or not plastic could be a threat to his own health. Starting the film this way allows the viewer to feel like they are joining Jeb in the investigation, not just being preached at about plastics and the environment.

Though *Bag It* begins with a plastic bag, the film is about all different types of plastic and the advantages and disadvantages of its presence in the environment and on our health. The film starts with the simple questions about one dominant consumer product and ultimately asks some significant questions about what plastic implies about our society and ourselves. Though the master narrative of the film is protagonist Jeb Barrier's investigation of plastics, we meet over 20 environmental experts and everyday people taking on the issue of plastic who play an important role in educating the viewer and providing a vision of the alternatives to ubiquitous use of plastic. The strategy of the film appears to be presenting problems one-by-one and demonstrating solutions right alongside the problems to maintain a sense of hope that the issue is manageable and possible to overcome. The primary audience for this film is individuals since many of the solutions presented are individual behavior changes rather than suggestions for corporate or political change.

IN THE DETAILS: STRUCTURE, BALANCE, & PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

Jeb Barrier is by all accounts a likeable dude. Though some may find his funny hair and thick glasses nerdy, you cannot help but chuckle at his expressions, jokes and antics and appreciate his casual yet committed approach to a serious issue. Jeb lives with

his partner Anne and their dog in a small town in Colorado, and though we never learn what his profession is, we do learn that he and Anne are expecting part way through the film, transforming them into a relatively average American family. What begins as personal curiosity for Jeb becomes an important quest of a father-to-be. With a baby on the way, Jeb's pursuit is not just about what plastic means for himself and the viewer, but also has important implications for future generations, a key message about values in the film. The viewer also gets to watch as Jeb makes changes in his own life along the way, which serves as a model for the viewer wondering how such behavior changes take shape. For example, throughout the film we join Jeb on trips to the supermarket, something most of us must do regularly, where we see him make more critical decisions about packaging, disposables and containers. Jeb is not simply a character in the story; he functions as a genuine and charming personality who makes the film engaging and the issues real.

The film's structure is critical the ultimate effect of the message. The seven sections of the film address the three main questions posed by Jeb at the beginning of the film: (1) Why is there so much plastic in the world and why do we do what we do with it? (2) Where does it go when we are done with it and what are the consequences? (3) Could all this plastic be bad for us? Each section starts by addressing a part of the problem of plastics and by the end involves some form of a solution or advice on what can be done in regards to that particular issue. The sections are separated by a similar scene, Jeb with his home video camera providing a question or commentary about what the next section would address, a clever and playful way to guide us from issue to issue.

The first section takes an intimate look at plastic the product: how it is everywhere; why it is good; why it is bad; how it is made; how much we use it; why it is a problem and who is behind it; the obstacles to getting rid of it; and who is fighting against use of [single-use disposable] plastic and why. The sections begins with a trip back to the 1970s when plastic was the wave of the future and western society was first fed the concept that disposable, "throwaway" living was easier and more convenient. Plastic was seen as an impressive resource, and indeed, as the film is quick to point out, it is. It is also a finite resource since it is composed of fossil fuels, and therefore needs to be conserved and used wisely. Consumption of 1 million bags per minute is not exactly conserving the resource, so Jeb looks at attempts made around the globe to slow or eradicate use of plastic bags, including bans, bag fees, and alternative materials such as paper bags. Back in the U.S. these types of efforts are aggravated by the efforts of the American Chemistry Council (ACC), an organization that works to protect the use of plastics and chemicals, and is quickly identified by the film to be a source of the prolific problem of plastic bag consumption.

This section performs several rhetorical objectives. There is a clear balance of past, present and future frames. We visit the past when our grandmothers used reusable bags, experienced the rise of plastics over time, we are shocked by current plastic bag consumption rates, and we are warned that persistence of such consumption will mean exhaustion of important resources. We also gain a clear social vision for alternatives to habitual plastic bag use when we visit cities and retailers who either prohibit or tax plastic bag use. When we learn that consumers subject to these regulations are anything but bothered by this situation, it forces the viewer to reflect on their own habits and how

such a change would impact them, a reflexive issue of values that help us think about the social implications of pervasive use of plastic bags. It also gives the viewer hope that a transition away from plastic is not only possible but fairly painless, a hopeful way of looking at the problem. The ACC is identified as a source of environmental degradation, which is reinforced when the ACC essentially ignores Jeb's attempts to include them in the film.

The second section looks more closely at one category of plastic, single-use disposables, which includes the "big three": bags, bottles and cups. It takes a more intimate look at the resource and energy-intensive production of such products. We are introduced to the shocking figures of single-use plastic consumption and the accompanying emissions that are a byproduct of production, distribution and disposal of these products. We learn about the social forces for plastic such as marketing that makes drinking bottled water "sexy." We also visit Germany for a look at an alternative to throwing away a plastic soda bottles and meet a woman in the States who shows us how to avoid plastic at home by using bar soap instead of liquid, glass containers instead of Tupperware or Ziplocs, and an antique metal razor instead of disposable plastic ones.

This section clearly performs a number of rhetorical objectives. A conversation about values is implicit here. The viewer is prompted to question how we (as a society and individuals) allowed ourselves to justify use of a plastic product, for only a few seconds in some cases, which is created from raw materials that took 70 million years to make. This question is in fact posed by the CEO of a bioplastics company that manufactures plastic alternatives, whose presence in the film promotes an important social vision for a more sustainable practice. A social vision for sustainable alternatives

is also promoted during the visit to Germany. Marketing is identified as a source of environmental degradation as it turns plastic consumption into conspicuous consumption. We are also engaged in an important conversation about values when we meet Beth Terry, the woman who has rid her life of plastic for the sake of lowering her impact on the world around her. As she states, "for me, it was realizing I was harming other living creatures and harming people and the environment, that's what woke me up." She emphasizes that making such changes offers a sense of ownership and responsibility in the issue, but it starts on an individual level.

The end of this section is a key point in the film where a primitive social vision is all but spelled out. Jeb goes through a specific list of things you should do: bring your own bag, coffee cup, water bottle, and most importantly, bring your own brain. He pushes us here to not just do things differently but also to think more critically about our consumption habits. An important solution to the problem of plastics is clear as glass only a third of the way into the film, undoubtedly a deliberate choice by the filmmakers to get the viewer involved and provide them with the tools they need even before some of the major consequences of plastic consumption are examined.

At this point in the film it becomes evident that the way the film divides issues into sections is and intentional strategy for guiding viewers through explanations of different parts of the problem (and solution) of plastic. The third section looks at specific problems related to plastic consumption and waste. To begin, Jeb points out that we as a society know we like to consume, and much of what we consume comes in plastic, but we do not necessarily know where that plastic goes when we are done with it. Things we use for a few minutes, like a plastic-lined paper cup or a soda bottle, become burdens for

hundreds of years when they are preserved in landfills. Jeb learns that this has become an unquestioned norm in our society, evident in industries such as fast food that will not even allow Jeb to use his own reusable plate in the drive-thru. Industrial norms as well as consumption norms are thus identified as sources of environmental degradation, since many of the disposable products that come out of this system end up in toxic landfills where they will be preserved forever. We also learn about the limitations of recycling and the environmental justice issues related to outsourcing plastic recycling. Jeb finds our that only certain types of plastic are recyclable, most recycled products only get one more "life," and the lack of recycling infrastructure in the US means that recyclables are often shipped overseas and processed in toxic factories by women and children. The myth of recycling as a cure-all is shattered, which is an important transition to talking about the concept of redesigning products to last longer, be less toxic and easy to repurpose. This section does some work balancing past, present and future frames, and also helps us think more critically about waste systems as a source of environmental degradation.

In the end of the third section we get advice about how to take the pressure off of recycling by paying more attention to the other three "R's": Reduce, Reuse and Redesign. We also get advice about how to think differently about what makes us happy, shifting our energy away from buying stuff, and towards improving social relations, a strategy proven to be a much less wasteful and much more rewarding venture. Again we are shown examples of what this advice looks like, how people are already embracing it, and as a transition to the next section, reminded of what happens if we do not.

The fourth section investigates the problem of plastic in the ocean. This section looks at: how plastic effects marine life through digestion, toxification and entanglement;

just how much plastic is in the ocean, specifically in the "Great Pacific Garbage Patch"; the science of photo-degrading and chemical concentration that ultimately threatens marine *and* human health; a satirical demonstration of how the plastics industry might respond to the problem of plastic in the ocean; and what is being done to attempt to mitigate or at least slow the problem of plastics in the ocean.

There are several rhetorical wins in this section. The section begins with a few words from National Geographic explorer Sylvia Earle, whose words inspire the construction of a hopeful, accessible and diverse environmental discourse:

> *"People ask why should we care about the ocean. It seems so obvious – the ocean is the cornerstone of the earth's life support system, it shapes climate and weather, it holds most of life on earth. 97% of earth's water is there; it's the blue heart of the planet. We should take care of our heart. It's what makes life possible for us. We still have a really good chance to make things better than they are. They won't get better unless we take the action and inspire others to do the same things. No one is without power. Everybody has the capacity to do something."*

As she is speaking we are presented with a scene where 4,200 children form a human collage on a beach that spells "save our oceans," reminding us that our choices will impact our children, and once again building on the conversation of values. Dismal figures on the impact of plastic digestion on marine species and shocking images of marine animals, including whales and seals entangled in plastic and the plastic-ridden stomach contents of deceased sea birds and turtles, reminds us of the urgency of the problem. A social vision is nurtured by a marine scientist sailing across the Pacific Ocean on a boat made of single-use disposable plastics in an attempt to start a conversation about ending the "age of single-use disposable plastics." Likewise, a professor of marine science reminds us that we need help from the industry and people involved with product design to help with material reduction, which invites the industry

itself to become a source of a more sustainable alternative. Finally, watching the U.S. Coast Guard's attempts to clean up some of the plastic from the ocean, even though complete cleanup is virtually impossible, serves as a great metaphor for doing what you can even in the face of insurmountable odds, a discourse of hope if ever there was one.

Section five is an investigation of the effects of plastics on human health. First, Jeb looks into the main chemicals and toxins associated with plastic products including phthalates and bisphenol-A (BPA), with a focus on how these chemicals affect the health of children and infants. Second, he investigates the systemic issues that exacerbate these health issues: no regulation, no testing, no labeling and no accountability. Finally, Jeb takes on a "body-burden experiment" to demonstrate the actual effects of the use of household and personal care products the industry claims are even safe for babies.

This section clearly points at sources of environmental degradation including the plastics industry and its low standards for human health, and the government and regulatory agencies that fail to regulate said industry. The conversation of values comes up again when we learn that without testing requirements in the U.S., chemicals are "innocent until proven guilty." Likewise, another expert states that the problem with plastics is not about being against all plastic, just the "stupid plastic…silly, stinking, toxic stuff." The point is that the values of the corporations are skewed, the government is failing to "mediate between the needs of the people and the needs of the corporations," and the conversation about plastics is not an attack on the industry, but a demand that they recognize our right to healthy consumer products.

The experts we meet in this section emphasize that changes on the federal level are a necessary part of the solution to the problem of toxic plastics. Before viewers are

intimidated by the need for systemic change, Jeb reminds us that consumer demand has already changed product regulations so that many children's products must be made with safe plastics. We also see Jeb gathering signatures to ban plastic bags in his hometown, and are reminded of the power of citizens in shaping our country and our government. Viewers are reminded that there are ways the individual can impact systemic problems, and given hope that progress is already being made.

The film completely shifts gears in part six, as baby Barrier arrives in the world. We are invited to watch as Jeb's son is born, a strategy that, as it develops, seems somewhat out of place in the film. Viewers could experience anything from disgust to deep emotion, but we slowly discover the distinct meaning of the scene, and the more critical viewer might appreciate the cleverness of it all. Ultimately, the birth of baby Barrier brings all of the issues discussed in the film full circle, back to the family unit introduced in the beginning, reminding us that these issues will be passed along to the future unless we act now.

This "moral" to the master narrative of the film is well concluded by Jeb as section seven, the conclusion of the film, begins. "It became about so much more [than the plastic bag]," says Jeb. Still appreciative of the importance of plastic as a resource, and still calling himself an average guy, Jeb again goes through a list of the things we can do to make changes. Experts who appeared throughout the film reappear as the credits roll to reinforce these suggestions and provide a definitive social vision for change.

These last two sections balance frames, restore urgency and provide a clear social vision for how to move toward a more sustainable alternative to bad plastics. The suggestions for change at the end of the film match the problems presented in the rest of

the film, making the problem of plastics seem highly manageable. The film goes one step farther, however, encouraging us not only to make changes in the way we consume plastic, but to also simplify our lives. This suggestion pushes the viewer to be reflexive about how changing the way we think about plastic can result in cascading rewards on other social and environmental problems. The filmmakers are taking a chance here that such a transcendent message will be salient for the majority of the audience, but it is likely that it only stuck with a few. In the end we are reminded that "it all comes down to common sense," a statement that serves as a strategy for making the message accessible to a diverse audience, not just those with an environmental agenda.

In sum, *Bag It* performs all six rhetorical objectives using multiple strategies in multiple sections of the film. The protagonist facilitates ease of understanding through his entertaining and accessible approach to the problem. The structure of the film balances problems and solutions to keep the viewer engaged and reassured and leaving them more likely to feel empowered in the end. By keeping the film rooted on one central issue, the plastic bag, the film makes it easier for viewers to grasp a variety of environmental issues without feeling overwhelmed. Finally, throughout the film, demonstrations and lists of practical things an individual can do are provided to constantly encourage the viewer to be part of the change and "make their life less plastic."

Before the credits roll, we are invited to visit BagItMovie.com to learn more and get involved. Those who visit the site will find a stylish but accessible website with resources for learning more, doing more, classroom materials, and ways to connect with organizations who tackle the issues in the film everyday. You can even find sample letters for sending to businesses and friends to suggest they become less plastic, and

connect with the *Bag It* team to make your town a "Bag It Town" and reduce the use of single-use disposable bags. The majority of the resources on the site are very specific to the issues presented in the film and are primarily aimed at getting people involved.

CONCLUSION: MULTIPLE SUCCESSES ON MULTIPLE FRONTS

In sum, *Bag It* utilizes multiple strategies that accomplish the six rhetorical objectives in numerous ways.

Generate agreement on the fundamental sources of environmental degradation. The problem of plastic, as portrayed by *Bag It*, starts with the existence of the material itself and ends with the everyday consumer. The film clearly points out that big industry and government support the production of plastic, but ultimately it is the everyday consumer who accepts its pervasive presence and allows the problem to proliferate. Rather than imposing blame, however, this strategy empowers the average viewer to take a hard look at their role in the problem and become a part of the solution.

Produce and project a consistent, positive and salient social vision of a sustainable society. All throughout this film the viewer is provided with a model that helps them imagine a more sustainable future, one that seems attainable and practical. This is accomplished by showing the viewer what broad solutions are already being pursued around the world, showing the viewer what basic solutions are being embraced by individuals in their own home, and a few other examples in between. Bag It is intentional about encouraging the viewer to understand the ultimate meaning of a life less plastic, which helps the viewer understand why change is necessary and the benefits of a less plastic future.

Foster a values-based discourse that guides a diversity of environmental frames towards a common agenda for social and ecological justice. *Bag It* takes on values in a number of different ways. The viewer is challenged to question what kinds of values drive themselves and society to accept ubiquitous use of plastic. The viewer also gets a sense that the values of the plastics industry are skewed and even ridiculous. This provides the viewer with yet another reason to rid their life of plastic. The reason for giving up plastic is often more emotional than material, done to save wildlife and ecosystems, increase personal happiness and health, and give future generations a more healthy approach to plastic consumption. The latter motivation is a key message within the film that elevates the significance of the problem of plastic in an important way. Though this point increases the responsibility of the everyday consumer to be part of the solution, it draws upon intrinsic values that justify behavior change on a core personal level.

Balance past, present and future frames. This film provides a good understanding of how the problem of plastic has proliferated over time, what is happening in the present to aggravate the problem, and what consequences loom in a plastic future. The film carefully investigates how the development of problems complicated potential solutions. The film also gives special attention to the present situation so as to help the viewer become more cognizant of connection between individual behavior and environmental harm. The viewer also gets a sense of how complicated the problem can become in the future if change is not embraced now. This balanced strategy helps the web of cause and effect that weaves through a layered issue become more comprehensible.

Restore a sense of urgency to environmental crisis. Three main points in the film help the viewer gain a sense of urgency about the problem of plastic. The most obvious is the problem of plastic in the ocean. Scenes depicting the havoc plastic wreaks on marine animals help us see a direct consequence of plastic consumption and "disposal," and warrants urgent attention to the larger issue of plastic use. Second, the viewer is shown how plastic threatens our health in ways we may have never imagined before. Finally, baby Barrier's arrival reminds us of the urgent need to make life less plastic for the next generation.

Aid construction of an environmental discourse that is hopeful, accessible and diverse. *Bag It* is strategically constructed to provide the viewer with solutions as each individual problem is presented. This helps the viewer maintain hope that the problem in manageable, and repetition of solutions throughout the film makes such solutions more accessible since the viewer can imagine the solution in may contexts and in connection to multiple issues. In this way the film also appeals to diverse interests, looking at issues from different angles even if the issues have common solutions. The overall tone of the film is lighthearted, which makes it enjoyable to learn about the problem and solution of plastic instead of an environmental reprimand. The focus on the journey of the central character in the film is instrumental in brining the issue to the level of the average viewer and helping them interpret problems and solutions in their own individual contexts.

Setting out to figure out what to do with that pesky plastic bag, the *Bag It* the film and its resources ultimately invite the viewer to be an active agent of change and have great potential to mobilize and promote movement.

CONCLUSIONS

Food, Inc. and *Bag It* are two films with short names and long agendas. A comparison of the strategies used in each film suggests that the way a documentary film about environmental issues is structured is a great indicator of the ultimate potential to promote agency in its viewers. Whereas *Food, Inc.* stacks problems back to back and spends little time flushing out solutions, *Bag It* strategically provides solutions that match the problems as they are presented. Both films also provide a specific list of suggestions for change. The way this list is presented seems to be the difference between education and mobilization. In *Food, Inc*., a written list appears as the screen goes, whereas the "characters" of *Bag It* repeatedly offer verbal reminders and advice. Finally, the tone of each film is markedly different, and though the eerie tone of *Food, Inc*. is appropriate to its theme of "lifting the veil," it adds to the intimidating nature of the film. The lighthearted approach taken by *Bag It* makes it easier to digest the breadth of environmental issues associated with the subject of the film. While I am not suggesting that a lighthearted tone is the only way to recruit agents of change, it is certainly something to consider when evaluating what kinds of films have the potential to reach a wide audience base.

More importantly, a comparison of the successes and failures of these two films helps us evaluate what rhetorical strategies are most likely to promote social movement on environmental issues.

First, films capable of social movement are motivated by a social vision for change, a sense of urgency, and clear targets on fundamental sources of environmental

issues. To identify films that employ such agendas, it is important to identify the ultimate goal of the film. There are many different possibilities: education, criticism, raising awareness, artistic expression, empowerment. Not all of these goals have the capacity to get people involved. A documentary film capable of promoting movement must have an agenda for getting its viewers involved and becoming agents of change either as a community or as individuals. These rhetorical objectives appear in the form of solutions that match problems, reminders about the seriousness of issues, and a conversation with or about the institutions and systems perpetuate those issues.

A comparison of *Food, Inc.* and *Bag It* illustrates this point. *Food, Inc.* certainly emphasizes the seriousness of the problems with the food system and exposes the institutions involved, but viewers are not shown how the "easy" solutions presented in the end of the film address the vast problems presented in the rest of the film. Conversely, *Bag It* constantly demonstrates solutions that are already addressing the problem of plastic, and the reward that will come from additional efforts.

Second, an audience capable of promoting change must feel that they have power over [environmental] problems, and films that present problems in an effecitve way balance past, present and future frames, maintain urgency without suggesting apocalypse, and focus on both material and emotional issues to foster a values-based discourse about social and environmental justice. It is therefore important to understand how the film approaches an explanation of the problem. Are all accounts of the problem accurate? Is the problem expressed in a similar way by multiple sources? Does the problem seem manageable and is a sense of hope apparent before audiences feel the problem is impenetrable? These rhetorical objectives appear in the form of investigation of a

problem's conception, growth, current state, and future implications; images and stories that display the gravity of environmental degradation and its implications on our own lives; and relatable characters and experiences along with inspiring narratives about human rights and experiences that compel us to ground our actions on the principles of health, equality and justice.

The significant difference in the way the two films balance past, present and future frames influences the effectiveness of each film in promoting a social vision and encourage agency. *Food, Inc.* fails to provide a salient comparison of the current, flawed system with a better past system or future vision. *Bag It*, on the other hand, spends time looking at how we lived before there was plastic, and the benefits of a less-plastic future, as compared to unsustainable current plastic consumption rates. Both films provide depictions of the depth of certain environmental problems, and we meet characters in both films that demonstrate the personal side of the issues. *Food, Inc.* includes a number of personal narratives and characters, while *Bag It* centers on only one, but *Bag It* is more likely to promote action because we see the character adopting practical behavior changes. In *Food, Inc.,* however, we meet characters struggling against the barriers to change, rather than meeting people who are embracing the changes *Food, Inc.* suggests.

Third, a film that promotes social movement provides *specific* access to *realistic* change. Do the solutions match the problems? Do the suggestions provided seem like realistic objectives and give the viewer a connection to appropriate resources? Are individual solutions identified as part of systemic solutions? All of the rhetorical objectives are important on this point. Audiences must know what sources of degradation they are targeting, why it is urgent that they act now, what values should

motivate their actions, what consequences could arise from inaction, what the results of their actions will be, and how they can take on the fundamental suggestions of the film in their own context.

The viewer gets a good idea of what the results will be if we take the advice of *Bag It*, but are unsure of the returns of the suggestions in *Food, Inc.* because not enough time is spent demonstrating the success of actions that have already be taken. A viewer is more likely to be inspired when they can see people experiencing positive results of sustainable behaviors.

Fourth and finally, a film capable of promoting movement must be able to provide access to solutions in different contexts. This means that the most effective films must will either address a blanket problem for an entire population and prescribe a population-level solution, or provide examples of problems in multiple contexts and explain what solutions are unique to those contexts. As an example, *Food, Inc.* briefly examined the problems experienced by low-income Americans, but never introduced us to the organizations working to provide healthy options to low-income families eating on a budget, therefore missing the opportunity to get *Food, Inc.* viewers involved in this particular issue, even though they found it significant to address in the film. In Bag It, we learn about multiple community efforts to ban plastic bags, and learn about organizations working against the plastics industry. A social vision and appeal to diverse environmental interests is key. Films that accomplish this are certain to not only present possible solutions, but solutions that are already being enacted, reassuring the viewer that they are joining a vital and determined effort. Also, investigating solutions in different

contexts can bring audiences closer to local options for getting involved within their own lifestyles and communities.

Organizations interested in using documentary film as the medium for promoting movement can use the above guidelines to find films that can energize audiences and arm them to engage in familiar and foreign issues alike. It is important to remember that films have different effects depending on the context in which they are seen, which provides an opportunity for organizations to interpret film messages in localized contexts and provide local resources for audiences prepared to enact change in their communities and personal lives. In this way films provide an opportunity for organizations to emphasize environmental issues in their own communities or connect their communities with important issues happening elsewhere that need more support.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As rapid changes in environmental policy and successes on the environmental front change the needs of the environmental movement, the rhetorical objectives of film will certainly shift. The urgency of the current environmental situation, however, warrants attention to the rhetorical objectives discussed in this paper and demonstrates the need for the movement to strategically recruit agents of change.

Using film to motivate audiences requires strategy in itself, and films that lack a motivating influence can still be useful if audiences are engaged in other ways such as panel discussions and forums that enrich the fundamental message of the film in a local or individual context. If films are best at simply starting a conversation, such as *Food,*

Inc., there are great potential rewards to continuing that conversation in such a way that an audience feels more empowered through the interactions that manifest as a result of simply seeing the film. This is true for more motivational films, such as *Bag It*, as well. The message of a film gains agency if it maintains presence in conversation and community interactions. The more a viewer is reminded of the issue in a way that connects back to the fundamental message of the film, the more empowered they are to become a part of the necessary change.

The mechanisms of social change are dynamic and perplexing, and understanding the communicative elements that drive ideological and discursive shifts is complex. By looking closely at cultural texts and their capacity for propagating social change we can gain access to effective strategies for promoting behavior change and social responsibility. The most compelling rhetoric alone cannot solve the world's environmental problems, but because we are symbol-using animals, it is a vital first step. As documentary film gains popularity and audience attention, understanding how to maximize the rewards of environmental documentary film's persuasive abilities can open the door to a vibrant, organized and productive environmental public sphere that is capable of realizing an industrious 21st century for the environmental movement.

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